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SIMPLE THOUGHTS
ON
BIBLE TRUTHS

LADY T. GROSVENOR.



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BY
LADY THEODORA GROSVENOR.



LONDON:
HATCHARDS, PICCADILLY.
1873.

100. w. 286.

LONDON :
JOHN STRANGEWAYS, PRINTER,
Castle St. Leicester Sq.

PREFACE.

THE Author offers these short chapters to the public, in the hope that they may be found useful for the purpose for which they were put together.

They are very simple, plain, readings, occupying about the space of time usually allotted to family prayers in the morning.

Their only aspiration is perfect freedom from all disputed or doctrinal points, and the utmost the writer hopes is, that from being easy to be understood, and not long

enough to be wearisome, they may perhaps draw the attention of the hearers to the great truths they touch on so lightly ; and if, by their means, any are induced to study more closely the grand system of our salvation, the highest aim of the Author will be accomplished.

CONTENTS.

- I. *Gen. i. 3.*—And God said, Let there be light: and there was light Page 1
- II. *Gen. vi. 12, 14.*—And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth 6
- III. *Gen. xxi. 17, 18.*—And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation 11
- IV. *Exod. iii. 5.*—And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground 16
- V. *Exod. v. 2.*—And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go 20
- VI. *Exod. xii. 24.*—And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever 25

VII.	<i>Exod. xiv. 14.</i> —The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace	Page 30
VIII.	<i>Exod. xxxiv. 21.</i> —Six days shalt thou work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest: in earing time and in harvest thou shalt rest	35
IX.	<i>Deut. xxxi. 2.</i> —Also the Lord hath said unto me, Thou shalt not go over this Jordan	40
X.	<i>Heb. xi. 30.</i> —By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were compassed about seven days	45
XI.	<i>Josh. xxiv. 24.</i> —And the people said unto Joshua, The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey	49
XII.	<i>Ps. xxxi. 24.</i> —Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord	54
XIII.	1 <i>Sam. xii. 19.</i> —And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king	59
XIV.	<i>Prov. xxvii. 1.</i> —Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth	64
XV.	<i>Jam. v. 17, 18.</i> —Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit	69
XVI.	2 <i>Kings, xix. 19.</i> —Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only	74

-
- XVII. *Ps. xxxiv. 16.*—The face of the Lord is against them
that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the
earth Page 79
- XVIII. *1 Kings, xvii. 24.*—And the woman said to Elijah, Now
by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the
word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth 84
- XIX. *2 Kings, v. 15.*—Behold, now I know that there is no
God in all the earth, but in Israel 89
- XX. *Ps. cxix. 82, 83.*—Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying,
When wilt thou comfort me? For I am become like a
bottle in the smoke: yet do I not forget thy statutes 94
- XXI. *Job, xxii. 21.*—Acquaint now thyself with him, and be
at peace: thereby shall good come unto thee 98
- XXII. *Eccles. ix. 18.*—Wisdom is better than weapons of war:
but one sinner destroyeth much good 103
- XXIII. *Ps. xxiii. 1, 2.*—The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not
want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he
leadeth me beside the still waters 108
- XXIV. *Isa. ix. 2.*—The people that walked in darkness have
seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the
shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined 113
- XXV. *Isa. xl. 6.*—All flesh is grass 118
- XXVI. *Isa. lv. 6.*—Seek ye the Lord while he may be found,
call ye upon him while he is near 122
- XXVII. *Jer. xxix. 12, 13.*—Then shall ye call upon me, and ye
shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you.
And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search
for me with all your heart 127

-
- XXVIII. *Dan.* ii. 20.—Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his Page 131
- XXIX. *Matt.* xxiv. 13.—But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved 136
- XXX. *Dan.* iv. 35.—He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? 141
- XXXI. *Dan.* vi. 27.—He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions 147
- XXXII. *Mark,* xiii. 33.—Watch and pray 153
- XXXIII. *Amos,* iv. 12.—Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel! 158
- XXXIV. *Matt.* v. 4.—Blessed are they that mourn 163
- XXXV. *Matt.* ix. 2.—And Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee 167
- XXXVI. *Matt.* xxii. 2, 3.—The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come 172
- XXXVII. *Matt.* xxvi. 11.—For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always 176
- XXXVIII. *Luke,* xxii. 15.—And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer 180
- XXXIX. *John,* xiii. 36.—Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards 184

-
- XL. *Acts*, i. 11.—Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven Page 189
- XLI. *Acts*, v. 29.—Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men 194
- XLII. *Acts*, vii. 56.—Behold, I see the heavens opened, and . . . the Son of man standing on the right hand of God . . . 199
- XLIII. *2 Cor.* xii. 10.—Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake : for when I am weak, then am I strong 204
- XLIV. *Acts*, xvii. 23, 23.—Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you 208
- XLV. *1 Cor.* xiii. 12.—For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face 212
- XLVI. *Col.* iii. 2.—Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth 216
- XLVII. *Jam.* iv. 14, 15.—Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that 221
- XLVIII. *Rev.* xx. 13.—And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them : and they were judged every man according to their works 225

-
- XLIX.** *Rev.* xxi. 23, 24.—And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it Page 230
- L.** *John*, v. 14.—Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee 235
- LI.** *Matt.* x. 32.—Whosoever, therefore, shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven 240
- LII.** *Matt.* xiii. 24, 25.—The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way 245
- CHRISTMAS DAY.** *Luke*, ii. 10, 11.—Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord 250
- NEW-YEAR'S DAY.** *Matt.* xxv. 13.—Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor hour wherein the Son of man cometh 254
- ASCENSION DAY.** *John*, xiv. 2.—In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you 258

SIMPLE THOUGHTS

ON

BIBLE TRUTHS.

READING I.

GENESIS, i. 3.

AND God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

IN the chapter from which this verse is taken we read the only account we have of the creation of the earth on which we live. Perhaps it is difficult to us to realise that there was a time when this earth, solid and familiar as it is to us, absolutely did not exist; when there was nothing, only space.

The first thing we read of in the Bible

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is of God, who, we know, always existed as a supreme Being ; for He is eternal, and eternity has no beginning and no end.

‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.’ And here we should pause a moment to dwell on the immeasurable power of that Deity who, out of nothing whatever, could by His omniscient will call a world into existence ; that, having made it, He should regulate by a wonderful law, which we vaguely call nature, all the times and seasons, the light and darkness, the rising and setting in changeless regularity of the sun and moon, and those bright planets we see so far above us every night, the succession of the seasons, the ebb and flow of the tides of the ocean, the ceaseless flood of waters that roll down in their channels to the sea,—all this, and much more than this, can but fill our hearts with awe and gratitude to the Creator of such an enormous system, whenever we reflect on the things we daily see around us, and remember that they are the work of an Almighty Hand.

The next thing God formed was light, His best gift to man. Then followed, in gradual succession, air, and that blue sky our eyes are never weary of resting on ; then earth was separated from sea, and grass and fruits were taught to grow. On the fourth day, or period of time, the great lights were made to rule the day and night, the sun and moon, and the stars also. At that period we may imagine the earth much, perhaps, as we see it now ; with vegetation, and trees, and bright sunlight, and clear cold moonlight streaming down on rock, and sea, and land : but all was lifeless, motionless, and still. No birds flitted through the air, no voice broke the stillness, no beasts grazed in the fields, no wild animals sought their prey in the vast untrodden forests, no fish stirred the waters, and there was no busy hum of insect life among the flowers, which blossomed and died unheeded and unseen.

But again the voice of God spoke, and at His word the great whales, and everything that moveth in the waters, sprang

into life ; every winged fowl also that flies in the open firmament of heaven—God blessed them and bid them multiply. After that cattle and creeping things were made, and the earth was filled with life and motion.

But it was reserved for the last day to see the crowning work of all—Man, created in God's own image: male and female created He them, after His likeness ; and to man was given the dominion over all the rest, and then God's blessing rested on them.

Man came first into life in sinless purity and happiness, too soon changed by pride and disobedience into sin and guilt, and, therefore, to sorrow. But with the sorrow God sent comfort, for, even before the sentence was passed on man, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return,' the promise was made, the hope was given, that 'the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head.' A promise which those to whom it was made could only feel to be dark and inexplicable, but which we read

by the light of the gospel. Christ, the son of Mary, a descendant of Eve, bruised the head of the serpent, who was Satan, when He overcame death on the cross, and by His blood obtained for us a glorious redemption.

After all the wonders God has done for us in creating light, and bestowing upon us all we have or hope for, and the great future He holds out to us all, let us not in senseless, reckless ingratitude, neglect so great salvation.

READING II.

GENESIS, vi. 12, 13.

AND God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt ; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me ; for the earth is filled with violence through them ; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

IN every great judgment which God has sent on the earth, the accounts of which are preserved to us in the Old Testament, we almost invariably find that the one man who did right before God was saved and excepted from the universal suffering or death with which the wicked were punished. God, who knows the hearts of men, discriminates between the evil and the good ; and there are several very obvious

instances in which He marked this distinction ; intended, it would seem, to show us that those who seek to do His will, and to walk through life uprightly, will never be ignored by Him, or find their efforts unrewarded. Even if in this world they suffer like others, and seem to obtain no advantage from their right-mindedness, and feel discouraged because their merit is not appreciated, they should cling to the thought that everything is known and marked of God. Nothing is too small for His notice, and every effort they make, every step, however difficult, that brings them onward in the right way, will be reckoned up to their advantage at the Last Great Day, when earthly prosperity will be of no avail, and one good deed, or gentle action, will be of more value than countless riches or world-wide renown.

We have before us the history of Noah, one of the sons of Adam, who lived in days when there were giants on the earth, and men's lives were so long that the space of

nine hundred years was not an uncommon lifetime. God preserved Noah from the great flood of waters which was to bring desolation and ruin on the earth; and it is difficult to stretch our imaginations so far as to realise what a flood that must have been that covered the whole of the earth, sweeping land, and sea, and rock, and river, beneath the resistless tide of rain and tempest that fell, without ceasing, for forty days and forty nights, till all the high hills that were under the heaven were covered.

And still that mighty mass of overwhelming waters prevailed, till all the topmost heights of the mountains were covered, and those who, terror-stricken, and yet clinging to the last hope of life, had struggled to the highest peaks—human creatures and animals alike—all were submerged, and there remained nothing alive but the inhabitants of the ark of gopher-wood, which floated in supernatural security on the surface of the great waste of merciless waters. And in that strange solitude the ark floated

for a hundred and fifty days ; for full five months.

The faith of the eight human souls within it must have been tried, when day after day, through all that weary time, the sun rose and set on the same unabated flood ; not the point of a hill, not a leaf of the tallest forest-tree, not a sign of life or movement of any description outside their own preserving ark. Still they were not forgotten of God, for at last, in His own good time, He sent a wind which assuaged the waters ; the windows of heaven were closed and the rain restrained. When at length the ark rested on something firm, Noah sent out two birds, a raven and a dove ; and the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and came fluttering in again to the sheltering ark. A second time the dove went forth, and returned with an olive-leaf, a token of joy and hope. Once more she flew away, and this time she returned not again.

Then Noah went forth ; and heartfelt must have been the prayer of thankfulness

which he breathed as he once more saw the green face of nature before him. Then followed the glorious promise of God, for His judgments are always tempered with mercy, and after the bitterest hour comes the brightest consolation. 'While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease.'

The beautiful arch of the rainbow appeared for the first time on the retiring clouds, the perpetual token of God's covenant with us that He will no more let the waters become a flood to destroy all flesh—a sign which endures to our day. And when we look at the soft colours of the rainbow, let us remember that He who put it in the sky saved Noah because he had found grace in His sight, and will save us too, if we seek His grace and love, as surely as seed-time and harvest do not cease, and day and night succeed each other: for God is the same, and His years shall have no end.

READING III.

GENESIS, xxi. 17, 18.

AND God heard the voice of the lad ; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not ; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand ; for I will make him a great nation.

SOME of the most interesting histories of the Bible are comprised in a few short verses, or, at most, in one or two chapters. The narrative of the building of the Tower of Babel—one of the most stupendous acts of man's presumption—and one with whose history we are all familiar, is distinctly and graphically told in nine verses. The audacity of the dwellers in the plain of Shinar, where they sought to build the

tower that should reach to heaven, the judgment of God upon them, and the consequent confusion of languages and dispersion of the people over the face of all the earth, are events which have a direct bearing on our own times and circumstances.

Before they occurred the whole earth was of one speech and one language, and, but for them, might have remained so to this day ; instead of which every country now speaks its own separate language, much hindering the universal intercourse of one nation with another.

Nine verses tell us all we know of the building of that great Tower of Babel, and in ten verses there is set before us one of the most touching histories in all the Old Testament—the story of Hagar and Ishmael. Ishmael, the son of Abraham, was the subject of much jealousy between his father and Sarah, and therefore Abraham, somewhat harshly as it must seem to us, rose up early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it to Hagar

and the child, and sent her away. A poor provision for exile!

But Hagar, though homeless and desolate, had a Friend more powerful than the great protector she had lost. She wandered, we are told, in the wilderness of Beersheba—a vast desert of sand, with no water; except, perhaps, an occasional well: but they were few and far between. Her store was soon spent, for her bottle of water would not last two people long under the burning heat of an Eastern sun. Depressed and weary, there was one great grief before her; her boy, the only thing she had left in the world to love or live for, was dying—dying for want of food and drink, and she had none to give him.

Her own needs were equally great; but the anguish of parting with her only boy absorbed all other feeling. She could not see him die; and seeking the scanty shade of some chance shrub, she laid him down beneath it; and after one last long look, she turned away and wept.

But in his heart the dying lad prayed

to the God of his father, and his prayer, unheard even by his mother, was borne to the heavenly throne; and instantly an angel left the bright realm to bring comfort to the despairing mother, and an answer to the unspoken prayer of faith. What must Hagar's emotions have been when, in the midst of that arid desert, the angelic voice fell like music on her ear—'What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not, for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.' Then followed again a great promise for the future: 'Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.' While before her eyes, where parched sand had been before, rippled a well of water. Which seemed to her the greater wonder,—the cool, refreshing, life-giving water, or the promise that her deserted boy should be the father of a great nation?

We know not what was the thought of the dying Ishmael, whether he sought comfort for his mother, or relief from his own sufferings. But we know that 'the

prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up ; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.' We know, too, that to those who love Him God gives more than either they desire or deserve.

READING IV.

EXODUS, iii. 5.

AND he said, Draw not nigh hither : put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.

THE customs of the Eastern nations are in many ways opposed to ours, and there is one in particular, a knowledge of which explains several verses in the Old Testament. When Moses was keeping the flock of sheep of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, the angel of the Lord appeared to him ; and although Moses was favoured after this with many other interviews with the Lord and His angels—when the voice of the trumpet sounded long and loud out of the fire and smoke of Mount Sinai; when the Lord talked with him at the

door of the tabernacle, where the cloudy pillar stood; when the 'still small voice' broke the silence of the desert; and, last of all, on the lonely heights of Mount Nebo, where he died, and was buried in his unknown sepulchre,—yet this appearance in the burning bush was the first intimation to Moses of that privilege of personal communication with his Maker by which he was afterwards so pre-eminently distinguished. The first thing that arrested his startled gaze was the sight of a bush flaming, yet not consumed; next, he heard a voice from out the fire calling him by his name, and this was followed by the injunction, 'Draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.'

These words conveyed a more forcible impression to the ears of the future law-giver than they would to us. It was the custom in the East, and still is, for the people to take off their shoes, or sandals, from their feet, whenever they entered a room or any sacred place, and therefore to be told as Moses was, to take his shoes from

off his feet in the middle of the place where his flocks were feeding, implied something sacred and great ; though perhaps, till the next sentence was spoken, ' I am the God of thy father,' Moses had not deemed that so great, so awful a Presence was near him. Then he hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

In the same way, almost in the same words, the angel announced himself to Joshua, when he appeared before him under the walls of Jericho as ' captain of the host of the Lord,' with his sword drawn in his hand,—' Loose thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy.' And to this day travellers before entering the mosques of the Turks, the temples of the Egyptians, or the pagodas in India, are required to take off their shoes, and leave them outside the sacred buildings.

These are marks of reverence, outward signs of the inward sense of awe, respect, and veneration, with which our hearts should ever respond to the sacred Name of

God, and of the calm, religious thoughts that should fill our minds when we enter God's temple. A token, too, are the way-worn sandals, bearing marks of travel and dust, of contact with the world, of worldly influences, and troubles, which cling to us, but which we should endeavour to cast away from us before we enter God's holy Presence; whether we come to Him actually in church, or only in our inward thoughts. But come as we may, and when we may, God is always there, with His gracious ear open to our imperfect petitions, more ready to hear than we to pray; ready to give more than either we desire or deserve. Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.'

READING V.

EXODUS, v. 2.

AND Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.

THIS passage occurs in the beginning of the very remarkable history of the plagues which fell upon the land of Egypt, when Pharaoh the king hardened his heart and closed his ears to the command of God, conveyed to him directly by Moses. This command was distinct and clear, that he should let the children of Israel go: but it was one which it cost Pharaoh much to obey, for these Israelites had so greatly multiplied during the time they had lived in his country that they now numbered six hundred thousand men, not counting the

children. When they first left their own country on account of the great famine which was raging in the land of Canaan, four hundred and thirty years before this time, they numbered thirteen principal men—Jacob, whose other name was Israel, and his twelve sons; one of whom indeed, Joseph, was already established in great prosperity in the rich kingdom of Egypt. They brought a large and starving train of wives and children with them, making seventy in all, having constantly in their thoughts the words which God had spoken to Jacob their father,—‘I am the God of thy father: fear not to go down to Egypt, for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt, and I will also bring thee up again.’

And now the full time had come for the fulfilment of that promise. For more than four hundred years this family had been rapidly increasing in numbers, adding by their labour to the prosperity of their adopted country, but looked down on and despised by their Egyptian rulers as an

alien race of slaves: for we are told that when a new king arose who knew not Joseph, he was smitten with a jealous fear of the superior force of this people of foreign extraction, and endeavoured to subdue them with tyranny, setting over them hard taskmasters, who treated them with cruelty and made their lives bitter with hard bondage. He even made an effort to have all the young children put to death. But his mad jealousy was only paving the way for the accomplishment of prophecy, and Pharaoh unconsciously performed his share in bringing about the realisation of the hope that had burned in the bosoms of the descendants of Jacob through all the weary years in which they had bowed their heads in bondage to the taskmasters of Egypt.

Had not God said to their father Jacob, when sending him down to the land of plenty, 'And I will surely bring thee up again?' In like manner the chief priests and the multitude who clamoured for the death of Jesus, only wrought out the words which had been spoken by the prophet,—

‘He was taken from prison and from judgment, he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken, and he was numbered with the transgressors.’

They knew but little what a great and glorious work, the redemption of a whole world, they were the means of assisting in carrying out; neither did Pharaoh dream that his very actions, intended to crush and destroy the hated nation, were in truth the first steps towards their deliverance. The Lord said to Moses, the chosen ruler, ‘The cry of the children of Israel is come unto me, and I have seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them, and I am come to deliver them.’ This was an answer to prayer; the sigh of the sufferers, that is, the sigh of six hundred thousand people, came up to God, and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Perhaps they needed to pass through the fiery furnace of affliction before they turned to God with prayer and earnestness. Their early days of prosperity in the fruitful

country of Goshen may have made them careless and forgetful of their God, and it was not till the oppression of the Egyptian monarch bore heavily upon them, and they found they were powerless to help themselves, that they raised this cry for succour, which God was so ready to bestow upon His chosen people. It was true in those old times, and it is true now, that 'the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.'

READING VI.

EXODUS, xii. 24.

AND ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever.

THIS was the first institution of the Feast of the Passover, and was established by the direct command of God to Moses. Nine plagues, desolating the whole land of Egypt, had been sent without effect ; for the heart of Pharaoh was still hardened, and he refused to let the children of Israel leave the kingdom, to go to a country whither the Lord would lead them by the hand of Moses. A heavier judgment still was needed—one that should touch the king more heavily. All the first-born in the land were to be cut off that night by

the destroying angel ; the eldest son of Pharaoh among the rest. But that the chosen people might be spared a special ceremony was required, and the Feast of the Passover was ordained. All the families of the children of Israel were to select the best lamb out of the flock, and to eat it in haste ; and some of the blood of the lamb was to be sprinkled on the outside door-posts, that the Angel of Death might see the sign and pass over (whence the name) the houses so marked.

It is not for us to suppose but that God could not, if He had chosen, have dispensed with any such outward token, but He instituted this ceremony on this solemn occasion, and desired that they should observe the ordinance for ever, in order to recall in future years the memory of the signal wonder which He performed at the close of the captivity in Egypt ; for in long years after the pilgrimage in the wilderness which followed the release from slavery, the descendants of these six hundred thousand souls might forget God's mercy to

their ancestors. Everything fades as time wears on, unless some special celebration is retained to perpetuate and keep fresh its memory. And thus it was that, nearly fifteen hundred years after this event, we find this great feast of the Jews maintaining its importance at Jerusalem. Our Saviour, the night He was betrayed, sent the Apostles, Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat. And when the hour was come he sat down, and the twelve Apostles with him.'

Surely since that terrible night, when it was first partaken of in haste by the trembling Israelites in the land of bondage, there never, in all the fifteen hundred times its anniversary had duly returned, had been so solemn, so wondrous a celebration of it as this, or one so strangely sad! It was, indeed, the last supper, the last gathering together, before the great event of the Crucifixion which was then looming upon them, of Christ and His loved Apostles. The last *time also in which the Passover was to be*

eaten at all ; for now, instead of the lamb from the Egyptian flocks which was sacrificed, Christ the Lamb of God was to be offered up. Instead of the words, ‘ Ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance for ever,’ the gentle command of our Saviour was spoken, ‘ Do this in remembrance of me.’ And even in these words are contrasted the stern observance of outward form which constituted the Jewish worship, and that softer religion of the heart which Christ brought into the world.

Just as the Passover was observed by the Jews, to revive their recollections of the great mercy of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in saving them out of the land of bondage and slavery, so ought the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper to be regarded by us,—a perpetual memory of the death of Christ, and our consequent deliverance from the bondage of sin ; and an act of obedience to the words of Jesus, spoken in that dark hour when the hand of him that betrayed Him was with Him on *the table*.

The Angel of Death passed over the houses of those who had sprinkled their door-posts in literal obedience to God's command, and he will pass over our hearts in mercy if we, too, obey the voice of the Lamb who died for us, and do this in remembrance of Him.

READING VII.

EXODUS, xiv. 14.

THE Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold
your peace.

THE whole history of the great journey of the Israelites after they had left the land of their slavery and bondage is one series of remarkable events. Many miracles were wrought during this passage through the vast wilderness which they had to traverse, and during that time the presence of God was almost always amongst them, and His protection guarded them like a shield through the temptations and difficulties that met them on their way. Their faith in those early days was but weak ; for we must ever *remember* that they had only a mysterious

promise to look forward to, while we have the accomplishment of prophecy in the history of our Saviour's cross and grave to look back upon, and therefore constant signs and tokens of God's presence were vouchsafed to them, to keep alive their belief and trust.

For Moses himself, who was then eighty-six years old, the charge and responsibility were heavy indeed ; for the leadership of six hundred thousand tumultuous people, through an unknown and barren country, would have filled his heart with apprehension, were it not that he received his directions immediately from Heaven, and that he was guided by day and night by a pillar, which moved ever before this great host. A pillar which took the form of a cloud in the daylight, and of fire in the darkness. So, in his most anxious moments, he had but to rest his eyes on that guiding pillar to feel that God was with him.

Before they had accomplished more than a very small part of the journey, which, though they then knew it not, was to con-

tinue through forty long years, they were already full of discontent and terror, and turned with bitter reproach to Moses, saying to him, 'Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou thus dealt with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?' For they saw the great army of Pharaoh following after them, in six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and they felt that if they were overtaken by their hated taskmaster, theirs would be a horrible fate—death in the wilderness, by the revengeful and furious hands of Pharaoh and his host. And what chance of escape had they, a vast mob of helpless people on foot, encumbered by women and children, while Pharaoh's rapid chariots were scattering in clouds the sand of the desert as they galloped hotly after the fugitives? The calm reply of Moses must in some degree have prepared them for the great miracle which God was about to perform for their deliverance,—'Fear ye not, *stand still*, and see the salvation of the

Lord which He will show to you this day : for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them no more for ever.' Before them a broad sea, behind them a revengeful army. Still the pillar of the cloud moved noiselessly before them, till they came nearer to the edge of the wide waters of the Red Sea ; and here the pillar moved back, till it stood between the fugitives and the followers, and while it was clouds and darkness to the latter it shone like fire to the people chosen of God, and kept them apart at night.

Then came the passage across the sea on dry land, for like a wall the mighty waters stood on each side of the sons of Israel, till all their great multitudes had passed through ; and the whole horde of wild Egyptians, rushing in after them in mad pursuit, were engulfed in the wild waters, which, when the restraining hand of God was withdrawn, broke from their unaccustomed subjection, and raged tumultuously over all the great host of Pharaoh and *his horses and his chariots*, and tossed

them in their waves, till there remained not so much as one of them, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore.

God saved them for His Name's sake, that He might make His mighty power to be known ; and we have only to read this, and the other great things His hand wrought in the wilderness for the fulfilment of His ancient promises to Abraham, to receive double assurance that of all the glorious promises He has held out to us in His Gospel, not one will fail: for our help, our only help, is in the Name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

READING VIII.

EXODUS, xxxiv. 21.

SIX days shalt thou work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest : in earing time and in harvest thou shalt rest.

THE latter part of the second book of Moses, called Exodus, is taken up with the laws and regulations given by God to Moses and Aaron, for the strict observance of His worship ; for even in the wilderness, which they were slowly travelling through, there were sacrifices to be offered and ceremonies performed, and in several places we find descriptions of the great decoration of the tabernacle, and the rich garments of the priests.

It was during this time that the ten *commandments* were delivered to Moses by

the hand of God Himself, written on two tables of stone. Moses went up into Mount Sinai, the chosen mountain, and there he remained for forty days and forty nights in direct communication with God.

It is remarkable that the one point most frequently alluded to during these sacred hours which Moses spent with his Creator was the due observance of the seventh, or Sabbath day. First, in the fourth commandment, 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy,' and the words which follow, are too well known to need repetition here. And it is again mentioned at the moment when the two stone tables of testimony were delivered to the Israelitish leader in exceedingly strong words,—'Verily my Sabbaths ye shall keep, for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death. Six days may work be done, but in the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord.'

When Moses, after forty most solemn *days alone* on the top of a barren mountain,

alone with God, descended to the plain, he found his people impetuous and impatient of his absence, worshipping false gods, and an idol in the form of a golden calf, and Aaron his own brother leading them in their rebellion and iniquity. In his despair and wrath he cast down the tables given by God, for such an ungrateful people were but little worthy to see those divine words; and he ground their golden idol to powder.

Once more, after sending a plague on the Israelites in just retribution for their sin, the Lord summoned Moses to His sacred presence at Mount Sinai, and delivering to him once again the Commandments written by the finger of God, He repeats the injunction regarding the Sabbath day,—‘Six days shalt thou work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest.’ Again, when Moses speaks the words which the Lord had commanded before the assembled multitudes, the first sentence he utters is still, ‘Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a Sabbath of rest to the Lord: whosoever doeth work

therein shall be put to death. Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations on the Sabbath day.'

Again, in the Book of Jeremiah we find the words, 'Thus saith the Lord, Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem;' and a few verses further on dire vengeance is prophesied on Jerusalem, 'if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the Sabbath day.'

So stringent was the ancient law, that no pressure of harvest-time, no bitterness of cold, no need of food, was to be any excuse for infringing on the strict observance of the Lord's day, as a day of holy and peaceful rest. Under the milder rule of the Gospel we find that the Son of God is Lord even of the Sabbath day, and that the letter was not to be heeded so much as the spirit of the law, for He rebuked the Pharisees for finding fault, and questioning the righteousness of His acts of mercy performed on that day; and while healing the *man who suffered from the withered hand*,

He tells us that 'it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath day.'

Still we may remember with thankfulness that God's holy rest was granted one day out of seven, and well may we devote that one to thoughts of Him from whom we have all that we enjoy, and all we hope to win at last.

READING IX.

DEUTERONOMY, xxxi. 2.

ALSO the Lord hath said unto me, Thou shalt not go over this Jordan.

MANY times did the children of Israel sin against God during their journey, and many times did He forgive them. As David graphically describes it in one of his psalms, written long afterwards, 'They forgot God their Saviour which had done great things in Egypt, wondrous things in the land of Ham—(Ham, one of the sons of Noah, peopled Africa with his descendants)—and terrible things by the Red Sea; therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath lest he should destroy them.' 'They angered him

also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes ; because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.'

The waters of Meribah, or of Strife, was the wonderful water which gushed out of a solid rock when Moses struck it with his rod. There was a want of water in the wilderness, and the ungrateful followers of Moses immediately turned upon him, as they invariably did whenever a difficulty arose, and spoke in words of bitter reproach, saying, ' Would God we had died when our brethren died before the Lord ! Wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt to bring us into this evil place ? It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates ; neither is there any water to drink.' Always forgetful of the sufferings they and their fathers endured in Egypt, they were at once impatient of their present temporary grievance, and had no faith to remember that He who had wrought such miracles to preserve them then, would surely not neglect them and let

them perish when they were already so far on their way. Another miracle was performed to convince them that their Protector was with them ; but Moses, wrathful at their ingratitude and want of faith, exceeded the command of God, who desired him to speak to the rock and it should give forth its water before their eyes : but addressing the assembled multitude in words of anger, he struck the rock with his rod, instead of only speaking to it. The water came out above directly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. But Moses for his impetuosity received a sentence which must have been a sorrow to him : he was told that he should not bring this congregation into the land which the Lord had given them.

All the weary task of guiding that vast army of people, rebellious and headstrong as they were, for many years had been his, and in his hours of rest how keenly, how curiously, he must have looked forward to the close of the journey, and the moment of *triumph* when at last he should set his foot

on the borders of the land that flowed with milk and honey, the land of promise and of plenty ! Such a moment, however, was not for him ; for he had trespassed against God among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah-Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin, and was not to cross the flowing river of Jordan.

When he knew that his end was near he wrote all the words of the law in a book ; he resigned his charge to Joshua, bidding him be strong and of a good courage ; and then, having blessed all the twelve tribes, for whom he had lived and laboured so long, he went up out of the plains of Moab to the top of the mountains of Pisgah, and there God allowed him to see the fertile plains of the Land of Promise. Jordan with its rich valley ; Jerusalem, where most of our Saviour's mighty works were afterwards to be done ; Nazareth, the birth-place of our Redeemer ; and Jericho, the city of palm-trees ; all were spread out before him : 'for his eye was *not dim, nor his natural force abated.*'

In the fulness of vigour he died, the chosen servant of God, and was buried in mystery by the Lord, 'for no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.' To him it was given to see the Land of Promise : may it be ours not only to see, but to cross the stream that divides us from it ; for Christ has died for us, and by His death we have a glorious and perfect redemption, which will wash our souls from the taint of sin, and bear us in safety to the bosom of our Lord.

READING X.

HEBREWS, xi. 30.

BY faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.

AFTER Moses had led the children of Israel from the tyranny of Egypt to within view of the Land of Promise he died, and the Israelites wept thirty days for their leader in the plains of Moab. Joshua, the son of Nun, succeeded to the command, and 'was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him; and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the Lord commanded Moses.'

To Joshua was appointed the task of leading them over the river Jordan, with the promise that 'every place that the sole of *your* foot shall tread upon, that

have I given unto you.' And the boundary of the country that was to be theirs was to be 'from the wilderness and this Lebanon, even unto the great river, the river Euphrates : all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast.'

There lay before them, in full view, the rich prospect of the promised land, with its verdant valleys, its flowing streams, its fortified towns, and fertile land. How refreshing a scene after their eyes had rested for so many years on the scorching sand of the desert, where they had suffered as only those can suffer who have experienced the want of water and of food ! They had only now, as at first they thought, to stretch out their hands and take possession, and peace and plenty would reward them for their hardships and trials in the wilderness.

But there were many difficulties yet to be overcome, many dangers to be encountered, many battles to be fought and

won. And, first of all, before they could set foot on their new inheritance the river of Jordan had to be crossed. Bridges in those days there were none; the fords, if there were any, were unknown to them; and again God manifested forth His power as He did at the Red Sea, and bade the waters divide, that they might pass through on dry land. The priests who bore the ark stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, while the people passed through right opposite Jericho.

Strange must the heathen Canaanites of that city have deemed it to see an army advancing against them by so supernatural a road! Stranger still, when that vast unknown enemy steadily encompassed their guarded city for seven days! Most awful of all, when the long blast of the rams' horns reached their ears, when they heard the sound of the trumpet and the shouting of the people, and their great wall, the strength of their pride, fell down flat to the earth! Thus was the first town taken and given up to the sword; and every-

thing was destroyed. And the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame was noised throughout all the country.

And God wrought great wonders for Joshua, and fought for Israel; and pre-eminently at Gibeon, where Joshua prayed and the sun retarded his course and hastened not to go down about a whole day. The sun stood still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon. 'And there was no day like that before it or after it.' For Joshua's faith had been tried and was not found wanting, and faith was the great attribute of the believers in the God who fought for Israel, and is still the first element in our Christian religion. 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.'

READING XI.

JOSHUA, xxiv. 24.

AND the people said unto Joshua, The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey.

AFTER the children of Israel, under the conduct of Joshua, had entered the promised land of Canaan, they found a great task before them. Before they could take possession of the country they had to drive out the heathen nations who inhabited it. And for three hundred years after the death of Moses their history is one long tale of fightings and conquest. Inch by inch they drove the idolaters before them, and we read of many powerful tribes delivered into the hands of the conquering army *that came from afar to overwhelm*

the land by an invasion of irresistible power.

Joshua says in his last address, after he had led them on from one victory to another, —‘And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them ; of the vineyards and olive-yards which ye planted not, ye do eat. Now, therefore, fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth.’ For God had fully redeemed the promises He had made to their forefathers. He had given them ‘a good land, and large, a land flowing with milk and honey, the place of the Canaanites and the Amorites,’ as He had spoken to Moses when He first sent him to Pharaoh. Centuries before that the same promise had been made to Abraham, when the angel blessed him out of heaven because he had not withheld his only son Isaac from being made a sacrifice to the Lord. ‘In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and *as the sand which is upon the sea-shore,*

and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.' The latter portion of this prophetic blessing, 'And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed,' remained yet to be accomplished in the birth of the Son of Mary at Bethlehem, some two thousand years after it was spoken. The promise of the vast multitudes that should spring from Abraham was realised in comparatively few generations.

Isaac, the son of Abraham, was the father of Esau and Jacob. The latter, also called Israel, was the father of twelve sons, who settled in Egypt on account of the famine in their own country, and became the heads of the twelve tribes, who already numbered six hundred thousand people when Moses first led them forth to free them from the tyranny of Pharaoh. During the forty years they wandered in the wilderness, and the three hundred more which passed ere they could call the land of Canaan their own, they must indeed have become as the sand on the sea-shore, *or the stars of heaven*, for multitude. Well

might Joshua recall to the remembrance of the people the wonders that God had done for them, and implore them in his last hours to serve the Lord and put away the idols which their fathers worshipped on the other side of the flood and in Egypt. Three times he made them promise, with one voice, that they would serve the Lord. He put before them the danger and the temptations of breaking that engagement. 'Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God. He will not forgive your transgressions and your sins, if ye forsake the Lord and worship strange gods.' Still the voice of the people rose confidently in his ear, 'Nay, but we will serve the Lord.'

Let that be our feeling and resolution also. God has done for us all that He did for the children of Israel; for their journey through the wilderness is a type of our journey through life. They transgressed and sinned; at each disappointment they were disheartened and full of discontent, for their faith was weak and

could stand no trial. After each sin, each evidence of disbelief, and each rebellion, God returned to them. He never left them nor forsook them, and at last, at the end of their pilgrimage, He brought them to the country He had promised them. And there He will bring us too, at last, when our work on earth is done ; there, 'where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary be at rest.'

READING XII.

PSALM xxxi. 24.

BE of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.

DAVID having been chosen by God, and anointed by Samuel the prophet, to be the King of Israel, became one of the most remarkable people of Bible history. We have the narrative of his life in the two books of Samuel. The first part of it, after he left the sheepfolds of his father Jesse, was passed in bitter dissension and civil war; in which the strife of his feelings between his enmity with Saul and his love for Jonathan the son of Saul, is a very striking and touching point. And the words in which David expresses his grief *at the death of Saul and his sons, slain*

by the Philistines on Mount Gilboa, form one of the most beautiful lamentations in Scripture.

David reigned for forty years. The first seven he was king of the tribe of Judah only, so it was during that time that he waged war with Saul; and after that he dwelt at Jerusalem, the acknowledged king of all the tribes. His life was a most varied one. He had little peace in his country, and can have had but little in his heart; for though God was always with him, he was constantly, by the evil nature of his own mind, or the petulance of his people, or the uncontrollable will of his great army, being led astray and committing some grievous sin, for which he suffered bitterly, and was then forgiven and restored to God's favour. But we know from the Psalms, which are the expression of his inmost thoughts, how deeply and how grievously he mourned and repented his sins, and how earnestly he sought forgiveness, and how frequently he breaks out into exultation over the exceeding great mercy of God.

One of the afflictions which pressed upon him was that he was not permitted by God, through the word of Nathan the prophet, to build a temple to the Lord. As he said, 'I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.' And of his anxiety to do so we read in the 132nd Psalm, where he says, 'Surely I will not come in the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.'

But this glorious work was not for him; perhaps his hand was too red with blood from the numbers he had slain, though in his country's defence, to be pure enough for this great undertaking: but be that as it may, he was allowed to know that the desire of his heart would be accomplished by his son Solomon, who was to reign after him.

Another sin of David's was his pride in *the great strength* of his subjects, for he had

them numbered, and in nine months and twenty days they counted them, and there were eight hundred thousand men that drew the sword. For this sin God gave him the choice of three judgments—famine, war, or pestilence. David, whose repentance ever followed close upon his sin, chose the latter, saying, ‘Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord, for his mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man.’

David in the hour of sorest trial had the strongest faith. He felt that the God who had carried him through the many troubles and trials of a stormy life would carry him and his people through this dark hour also; and he hoped by earnest prayer to avert the extremity of severity, and by timely sacrifices to stay the hand of the Lord.

Let us have the same faith in our times of trial. The same Lord is our judge who was David’s; and His heart is still as full of long-suffering and mercy. When dark clouds hang over us, and sorrow, the just punishment perhaps of our sins, threatens

to overwhelm us, let us turn to God with heartfelt prayer ; and raising our eyes to the Cross, let us remember that Christ our sacrifice, who has died for us, has still the power to say, ' Arise, thy sins be forgiven thee.'

READING XIII.

1 SAMUEL, xii. 19.

AND all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not : for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king.

THE early history of the prophet Samuel is very familiar to all readers of Bible history. He was the child of prayer, and his mother brought him to Eli, the high-priest of Israel, and from her grateful heart she spoke to him : 'For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him ; therefore also I have lent him to the Lord, as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord.' She knew not what a high destiny awaited him—that he should become a great prophet, whose words were to be preserved through all time,

handed down from generation to generation—to reach even to our day. It is about three thousand years ago that Samuel was given up, by Hannah his mother, to the worship of God's temple, and yet his history has come down to us as fresh and ample as though he had lived not more than as many hundred years ago. We know, from the description of modern travellers, the cities where he dwelt; the country where, sent of God, he anointed the fair young shepherd-boy, in the midst of his brethren, to be the future powerful King of Israel. We know the situation of Ramah, where Samuel died in his house, and where all the Israelites gathered together to lament and bury him. And above all, we know the touching story of his youth, when he served in the Temple, and the Lord called him, and he ran to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for thou calledst me.' Three times the voice of God aroused him, yet it was only at the third time that he recognised the Divine call, and answered, 'Speak, for thy servant heareth.'

Can we not draw a parallel between

Samuel and our own hearts? Are not warnings and better thoughts sent to us by God? and yet, from the blindness of our nature, we do not acknowledge the source from whence they spring, but let them pass, unheeded and uncared for.

The prophet was acknowledged as such by all Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, and the Lord was with him. Two great actions are the chief events of his life—the anointing of two kings. The first was Saul, the son of Kish. For the children of Israel, ever ready for strife and rebellion, revolted against the judges who had hitherto ruled them; and not only against the judges, but against the King of kings: for when Samuel, perplexed at the urgency of the people's request, appealed for directions to the Lord, the Lord said to Samuel, 'Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.'

So Saul, the tallest and the most goodly among the tribes, was selected to be captain

over the rest, to save the people out of the hands of their enemies the Philistines ; and as he was travelling through the country seeking his father's lost asses, he was, no doubt to his own inconceivable astonishment, anointed king over Israel. But Saul, though a great warrior, kept not the commandment of God ; and in choosing to have an earthly king set over them, his people found that they had not improved their condition or added to their prosperity, for not only had they fierce wars with their enemies through all the earlier part of his reign, but were also disturbed by bitter internal discord between Saul and David, the second shepherd-king whom Samuel, by God's command, had anointed.

This, again, is a lesson for us to be contented with the lot we have ; for by seeking to improve it, if in any degree, however slight, our measures are in opposition to God's will, we are sure to find, ere long, that we have drawn ourselves into a worse, instead of a better position ; and when there is no going back we shall

try, though in vain, to be again as we were before, in a state perhaps less brilliant, but almost certainly more happy.

There is little happiness on earth without its corresponding trouble, and those whose sun shines brightest find also the deepest shadows.

READING XIV.

PROVERBS, xxvii. 1.

BOAST not thyself of to-morrow ; for thou knowest
not what a day may bring forth.

As the Psalms give us an insight into the thoughts and feelings of David's heart, so the Book of Proverbs reveals to us something of the inner nature of Solomon his son. Solomon was the wisest king of ancient times, the wisest among men, and to him was given the privilege that was denied to his father—the permission to build the Temple of God. This he did with regal magnificence, and from the description we read of its erection in the early chapters of the Book of Kings, it must have been surpassing in size, and decoration, and *riches*.

Solomon spared no effort to make it worthy the object for which it was destined. The choicest cedars of Lebanon fell beneath the axe ; for the beams and boards, and for the rich carvings within ; for all was cedar, and no stone was seen. The part intended to receive the ark of the Lord was overlaid with pure gold. And Hiram, a worker in brass, came from the rich city of Tyre to labour for the Temple, and he wrought much fine work in metal. Seven years were passed before this great building was completed. It was commenced in the month of April, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, and ended in the October of the eleventh year.

During this time the work went on in silence and reverence, 'for the house when it was in building was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither, so that there was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house while it was in building.' Thus he accomplished the desire which had filled the heart of his father, for as he said in the message he

sent to the King of Tyre, who was ever a lover of David, 'Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the Lord his God, for the wars which were about him on every side ; but now the Lord my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent.'

Also God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the East country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. Besides this he had great riches, and he built a palace for himself, and one for his queen, the daughter of the King of Egypt ; and more than that, he built seven cities, and the wall of Jerusalem, and also a fleet of ships which brought him gold and treasure from distant countries. And above all, God pronounced a blessing on him : ' If thou wilt walk before me as David thy father walked, in integrity and uprightness, then I will establish the throne of

thy kingdom upon Israel for ever, as I promised to David thy father. There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel. But if ye shall turn from following me, and go and serve other gods, and worship them, then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them ; and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight.'

After experiencing for thirty years the protection and favour of God, can it be believed that in his old age Solomon should have forgotten the years of the right hand of the Lord, and have turned after other gods ? But it was so : for we read that his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, and he went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and did evil in the sight of the Lord ; so that the Lord was angry with Solomon, embittering his last years with wars, wresting the kingdom from his son, leaving him the government of two tribes only.

This is a warning against false security. Even the wisest of men fell away into sin

in spite of his wisdom and greatness ; so constantly is our adversary the devil on the watch for those who, lulled into too great self-confidence, neglect our Saviour's oft-repeated warning to 'Watch and pray.'

READING XV.

JAMES, v. 17, 18.

ELIAS was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain : and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

AFTER the death of King Solomon a series of kings reigned over Israel and Judah, many of them worshippers of idols, and almost all strangely forgetful of the great goodness of God, who had done such wonders for their ancestors, and who was ever ready to extend the same mercy to them had they shown themselves worthy to receive it. One of the best of the number was Asa, who reigned for forty-and-one years over Judah, for we read of him that

he removed all the idols that his fathers had made, and that his heart was perfect with the Lord all his days.

In the few verses that give us the short chronicle of his reign, and bear testimony to his faithfulness in an idolatrous country to the true God, we find the second mention of the brook Kidron, that brook which nine hundred years after was made a sacred word to us for ever, as the scene of our Saviour's betrayal by Judas in the garden of Gethsemane. The first mention of it is in the description of David's flight from Absalom, when he crossed the brook as he fled from Jerusalem. In Asa's reign we find that he took the idol which his mother worshipped, and burned it by the brook Kidron; and a similar act was performed three hundred years after by Josiah, another righteous king of Judah, who put down the idolatrous priests who worshipped Baal, and the sun, the moon, and the planets, and 'brought their idol out of the temple of the Lord to the brook Kidron, *and burned it at the brook Kidron, and*

stamped it to small powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people.' 'The altars also to the idols he burned down, and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron.'

It was towards the end of the reign of Asa that Ahab, the worst of all the kings, succeeded Omri, his father, in Israel; and it is when sent to rebuke him for his wickedness that we first hear of Elijah the prophet—a prophet whose life is full of interest, and whose glorious and extraordinary end, without death, bears testimony to the perfect uprightness of his heart: for no other man has been, or ever will be, so favoured by his Maker, as to be conveyed to his eternal reward in a whirlwind and in a chariot of fire, with all his strength and vigour unabated, his powers undecayed, and without passing through the valley of the shadow of death.

Elijah came with God's judgment to Ahab, and pronounced on him the dreadful sentence that neither rain or dew should fall upon the land for several years. 'To

realise the full force of such a prospect, we must remember that in the eastern country of Syria, in which the land of Israel lies, the supply of water is very limited, the climate dry and hot, and the brooks small and dependent upon the regular rains for their supply of water.

This sentence meant, then, nothing less than absolute famine throughout the country; and not a dearth of vegetation alone, but a total want of that first necessary of life, water.

Here follows the well-known story of the preservation of the prophet himself, who, as long as any water flowed in the brook Cherith, dwelt on its banks, while the heaven-sent ravens brought him bread and flesh for his food morning and evening. When the brook dried up, the prophet, inspired of God, went to a widow in Zarephath, who by her humble faith and ready obedience obtained support for herself, her son, and Elijah, who dwelt with them during the three terrible years of sore famine by which the country was desolated;

‘for her barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sent rain upon the earth.’

Even in the midst of so much wickedness as to provoke the Lord to send so severe a judgment on the offending country, he was ever ready to save and to spare; and this widow of Zarephath, whose name even is not recorded, was made the object of special mercy—as Lot was saved from Sodom, and Noah from the flood. No soul, however humble, that seeks to do right, but is marked of God, and will never be overlooked or forgotten by Him.

READING XVI.

2 KINGS, xix. 19.

NOW therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only.

THERE is but one event in the Bible history which can afford a parallel to the overwhelming destruction of the Egyptian hosts in the Red Sea, and that is in the desolation which swept away the whole army of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, in one single night. Hezekiah, who then reigned over Judah, was one of the few kings of that country of whom we find much good recorded, for 'he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all *that David his father did.*'

It is curious that in the verse which speaks of his hatred of idolatry, which was shown by his breaking the images and removing the high places where the idols were worshipped, we find a record of the brazen serpent which Moses had made by God's command in the wilderness, when the people were punished for their never-ceasing murmuring and complaining against their ruler by a plague of fiery serpents. The Lord had said to Moses, 'Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall come to pass that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.' And Moses made a serpent of brass. In the seven hundred years that elapsed between the erection of this serpent in the wilderness and the day that Hezekiah brake it in pieces, it had become an idol, for the children of Israel did burn incense to it; thus degrading it utterly from its original purpose, and instead of regarding it as a type of the God who bid them look to it and be healed, they came to regard it as *the God itself*.

It was a great emblem of the salvation of the gospel; for those who were bitten by the fiery serpent, that is, by Satan, often described as a serpent, had but to turn their eyes to the cross on which our Saviour died to find there the healing or forgiveness that they needed. Our Saviour Himself says, 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' This desecration, then, of a holy symbol to an idolatrous purpose, was done away with by Hezekiah, who trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah.

But the sins of the people of Israel were great, and for that reason the Assyrians had great success against them, and carried many of them captive into Syria; and they also took some of the strong cities of Judah. Hezekiah, foreseeing sorrow and trouble to his country, sent for Isaiah the prophet, asking him to lift up his prayer to avert

the calamity which threatened him. And he might well feel that without the help of God he could not stand against so strong an enemy ; for Judah, though the largest and most warlike of the tribes, was after all limited by the bounds of a small country, and the army of the enemy that was marching against him numbered no less than a hundred and eighty-five thousand men.

No power but that of the God of his fathers could avail to help him in this dark hour, and therefore the words of Isaiah must have been music in his ears : ‘ I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return to his own land ; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.’ The blast came, and the sound of the wings of the destroying angel was heard over the whole of the Assyrian camp in the night, and in the morning they were all dead corpses. Not a man remained of the hundred and fourscore and five thousand. Full of life and vigour the night before, in the morning

there was not one to draw the sword, or blow the trumpet, or strike the tents that formed the camp of that great dead army. All was one terrible, solemn silence ! The vast silence of death ! Hezekiah was thus miraculously delivered, and his people saved from the hand of the enemy, for the Lord never faileth them that put their trust in Him. And Hezekiah might well sing in the words of David his forefather, ‘ He hath remembered his mercy and truth toward the house of Israel, and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.’

READING XVII.

PSALM xxxiv. 16.

THE face of the Lord is against them that do evil,
to cut off the remembrance of them from the
earth.

FROM the time of Elijah, through the long life, full of good and great actions, of his follower Elisha, down to the days of King Hezekiah, comprising the best part of a century, the children of Israel and of Judah were seldom left long without some signal instance of God's presence being vouchsafed to them. In spite of this, with some few exceptions, their kings were chiefly remarkable for their wickedness. Amongst them the most notorious was Ahab, whose covetousness in the matter of the vineyard of Naboth has passed al-

most into a proverb. Near the palace of the king lay the vineyard, and Ahab sent to Naboth, saying, 'Give me the vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near my house, and I will give thee a better vineyard for it, or the worth of it in money.'

So far the offer was fair, but Naboth refused to part with the inheritance of his ancestors. Therefore Jezebel, Ahab's wife, came to him, and, like a second Eve, she led him to sin. By treachery and false accusations she procured that Naboth should be found guilty of blasphemy, and stoned to death. Then she bid Ahab arise and take possession of the vineyard. And Ahab rose up and took possession of it. But even then the voice of God was ringing in the ears of Elijah the prophet, bidding him go down to meet the King of Israel in Samaria, in the vineyard itself, and speak thus to him :—'Hast thou killed, and also taken possession ? Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy

blood, even thine.' And at the same time judgment was pronounced on Jezebel, 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.'

Such a specific sentence, one should think, would have made the most hardened and inveterate sinner pause, and think, and repent. But it was not so with Ahab and Jezebel, for we are told that there was 'none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.' But yet even he cannot have been wholly wicked, for the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'Because Ahab humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his day, but in his son's day will I bring the evil upon his house.' The prophecy regarding Ahab's death was, however, fulfilled ; for three years after war arose between Israel and Syria, and Ahab, deluded by the voice of false prophets, against whom the truer words of Micaiah could not prevail, went into the battle disguised as a common soldier.

But the sentence had gone forth against

him and the word of Micaiah came true. A man of the enemy drew a bow at a venture, and the shaft pierced the joints of the king's armour; and as the sun went down in heaven the king died in his chariot. In order that the prophecy might be literally accomplished, while the chariot was being washed in the pool of Samaria, dogs came and licked up his blood.

There, where Naboth fell, stoned to death, the blood-stained chariot and armour of the fallen king were washed; and in the portion of Jezreel, the field of Naboth, was the body of the wicked Jezebel devoured by dogs. There, too, was the body of Jehoram, son of Ahab, cast, after he was slain by Jehu, the man appointed by God, through Elisha, to execute vengeance on the house of Ahab. No fewer than seventy of Ahab's sons and grandsons were slain by him; and he destroyed all that remained of the house of Ahab, all his great men, all his kinsfolk, and his priests, till he left none remaining.

So fearful are the consequences of unrepented sin ! so fierce is God's wrath upon those who neglect and scorn His warnings ! Well might the prophet Micaiah, after lamenting the wickedness and idolatry of the people among whom he lived, turn with anxious hope to the prospect of a future Saviour, whose blood should redeem Israel from all his sins.

READING XVIII.

1 KINGS, xvii. 24.

AND the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.

THERE are several points of similarity between the history of the life of Elijah the prophet and that of our Blessed Saviour. There were hungry multitudes fed by our Saviour with miraculous food, for His tender care for the physical weakness of our nature was always remarkable; and we read of Elijah also supplying a store of food and drink to the poor widow of Sarepta, by Divine agency, when there was a famine in Samaria, and neither meat nor water to be found in all the land.

Another terrible sorrow fell upon the

poor woman. Her son fell ill and died. Elijah prayed for his life, and it was given to him. 'The soul of the child came unto him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of his chamber into the house, and delivered him to his mother; and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth. And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.'

In like manner, and on more than one occasion, our Saviour restored the dead to life. In particular, we read of a case almost exactly parallel to that of Elijah's, when our Saviour raised to life one who was 'the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.' When Elijah sought a follower, he did not seek him among the learned of the land, but he found Elisha, the son of Shaphat, who was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen; and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him; and he left his oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, 'Let me, I pray thee,

kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee.'

Jesus, in like manner, chose His disciples for their faith, not for their learning or their eminence. Four of them were simple fishermen, mending their nets on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Matthew was a publican, sitting at the receipt of custom. The others were humble men, chosen out of the multitudes who thronged to hear Him preach. Elisha, too, hung on the words of Elijah, and having followed him and ministered to him through many troubled years, he was at length the witness of his glorious ascension to heaven in the chariot of fire with the horses of fire. And his constancy and devotion were rewarded, for, though three separate times had Elijah bid his faithful follower tarry for him at Bethel and at Jericho, yet, apprehensive of the parting that was near, Elisha clung to his master, and each time answered him with the same fervent words, 'As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.'

He gained the reward of his steadfastness ; for after they had passed, by the power of another and last miracle, on dry ground, through the rapidly flowing waters of Jordan, Elijah said, ' Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away from thee.' And Elisha made the wise request, that ' a double portion of Elijah's spirit should be upon him.' That prayer was granted.

He witnessed the departure of his loved master, and when he turned to recross the river, his heart overflowing with grief, he called on the Lord God of Elijah ; the waters parted, and he realised that the spirit of power and prophecy was with him.

Christ blessed the eleven disciples who were witnesses of His ascension to heaven, and His parting promise was spoken to them, and to all who follow in their faith, ' I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.'

As the mantle of Elijah fell on Elisha, so Christ's parting blessing will fall on us

if, with the eye of faith, we are witnesses of Him till He come, for His promise to us is always the same,—‘If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.’

READING XIX.

2 KINGS, v. 15.

BEHOLD, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.

THESE are the words of Naaman, captain of the host of all that great conquering army of the King of Syria. Suffering from a terrible illness, one which generally cut off the afflicted man from all intercourse with his fellow-creatures, this great soldier, who stood high in the favour of his sovereign and had saved his country by his valour,—this great man was bowed down by the hand of God, and could obtain no help or relief from all the science and learning of his country. In his deep distress he caught at any-

thing that might offer any prospect of cure ; and hearing from a little maid whom his armies had brought a prisoner out of another land, that in her country of Samaria there was a prophet who could recover him of his leprosy, he determined to seek out the man who possessed this mysterious power, and by rich presents of silver and gold bribe him to restore him to health.

He put his trust, however, in the princes of this earth, for God was unknown to him. And yet he must have been a kindly man, or would the little maid who was a slave, and a captive in his house, have spoken so earnestly to her mistress as she did ? ‘Would God,’ she said, ‘that my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria, for he would cure him of his leprosy.’

So Naaman travelled to the king of the country whence the little captive came ; and the king, when he received the message from the Syrian monarch praying him to cure his captain of the host, knew so little

of the prophet who dwelt in Samaria, that he thought it was only a fresh cause of quarrel that was sought.

He had suffered much from the recent invasion of his powerful enemy, and naturally dreaded above all things a second inroad.

He rent his clothes when Naaman came before him, and said, 'Am I God, to kill or to make alive?' But Elisha the prophet, inspired by God, sent to inquire of the king wherefore he rent his clothes; and prayed that Naaman should be sent to him, that he might know that there was a prophet in Israel. And he had also to learn that there was a God in Israel, the only true God.

Elisha worked the miracle of the cure so simply that Naaman was dissatisfied. He thought some great thing would have been done, and when merely told to wash seven times in Jordan his pride revolted, and he remembered the wide-flowing rivers of his own land, and thought they were pure enough to wash away disease if that

were all that were needed. But it was not all. God needed faith and obedience; faith in His power, obedience to His will.

When he washed in Jordan's stream, and found to his astonishment and joy that a miracle had been worked upon him, he returned, and made an open acknowledgment of his belief. 'Behold, now know I that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel;' and 'thy servant,' he said, 'will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods but unto the Lord.'

This was a great conversion; a mighty work had been wrought on this man, whom we cannot but believe was a good man, and that the saving of his soul caused joy in heaven. As in the New Testament we read of our Saviour healing the sick by saying to them 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' so had He done to Naaman. His physical illness was cured, at the same time that his soul was saved, his heart was changed; and from a heathen he became a believer.

God's mercies are equally extended over

us. He gives us in these days greater opportunities of leading quiet, religious lives, than He gave to Naaman ; let us see that we are not less grateful, for ‘unto him to whom much is given, of him shall much be required.’

READING XX.

PSALM cxix. 82, 83.

MINE eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me? For I am become like a bottle in the smoke: yet do I not forget thy statutes.

WHEN Abraham, in the early dawn of the morning, sent Hagar away from the shelter of his tents, that she and her child Ishmael might perish in the wilderness of Beer-sheba, he gave her bread and a bottle of water, putting it upon her shoulder. A modern bottle is not here meant, of earthenware or glass; but one of those made of leather, or rather of skins, which were used in those ancient times. They were generally made of goat-skin, but sometimes of camel or ox-skin, prepared by tanning. The goat-skins were used whole,

and the others were sewn up and made long water-tight cases, easily carried over the shoulder, as they bent at any pressure.

Remembering, therefore, that they were made of skins, the words of the Psalmist become clear to us, when to express his state of exhaustion under severe suffering he likens his condition to 'a bottle in the smoke.' The Arabs made fires occasionally within their tents to cook their food, and naturally the atmosphere was soon clouded with dense smoke, for there was no way but by the door of the tent for it to escape. The goat-skin bottles hung up in the tents soon became black, and when not filled with water they quickly shrivelled and dried up. David may also have intended by that expression, 'I am become like a bottle in the smoke,' to show that he was no longer dwelling in his palace, and using vessels of gold and silver, but was forced to take refuge with the wandering tribes of the desert, and drink, as they did, out of a smoked bottle of goat-skin.

When the men of Gibeon came craftily

to Joshua, trying to represent themselves as travellers from a far country who had come to make a treaty of peace with him, they not only put old shoes on their feet, and clothed themselves in old garments, but they provided themselves with wine-bottles that were old, and rent and bound up, that they might point to them as evidence of the length of their journey and say,—‘ And these bottles of wine which we filled were new ; and behold, they be rent.’ Proving that they also were bottles of leather, which when torn, or worn with age, could be mended and bound up.

This brings to our minds our Saviour’s words, ‘ No man putteth new wine into old bottles, else the new wine doth burst the bottles and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred : but new wine must be put into new bottles :’ by which our Lord intended to show the danger of imposing hard precepts on those who were unqualified to bear them. Thus rebuking the ostentatious righteousness of the Pharisees, who compared the simple devotion of His

disciples, with the adherence to forms and ceremonies, and particularly the outward show of fasting, which distinguished their followers.

Some few words in our present translation of the Bible also are incorrectly given, particularly the well-known verse that 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.' The word translated 'camel' also means a 'cable or rope;' a much more rational comparison: though it has also been suggested that 'the Needle's Eye' was the name of one of the gates in the walls round Jerusalem, large enough only to admit foot-passengers, and therefore almost, if not quite, impracticable to a camel. Be this as it may, there is enough in the Bible that is simple and clear to show us the way of salvation, and always more and more to be learnt if we obey the precept and 'search the Scriptures.'

READING XXI.

JOB, xxii. 21.

ACQUAINT now thyself with him, and be at peace :
thereby shall good come unto thee.

UNLIKE many of the biographies of the Bible, which are often condensed in some verses, or into a few pages, a whole book of forty-two chapters is given to the history of Job. The exact time at which he lived is unknown, nor do we know who it was that wrote the record of his life which is left to us, nor the country whence he came, or anything indeed of him but what is told in the book called after him—the Book of Job. His age when he died was great—he was old, and full of days ; for after he had suffered the trials and afflictions which God permitted him to be oppressed with, after

he had mourned for the loss of his ten grown-up children, he was allowed one hundred and forty years of peace and prosperity. Moses died at the age of one hundred and twenty years, and Joshua at that of one hundred and ten, and as the years of man decreased as time went on, we must conclude Job lived before Moses. We also gather that the land of Uz, the country of Job, was in Asia.

Job's history is well known: he was a perfect and upright man, who feared God. Still he was a man, and Satan had power over him; and though when misfortune first overcame him he bore it patiently and with resignation, yet when repeated afflictions visited him he gave way to bitterness and despair.

When his flocks and herds were taken by the Sabeans (a tribe of Arabia), when the Chaldeans fell upon his camels and slew his servants, and when a storm came from heaven and brought death to all his children in one stroke, he fell to the ground overwhelmed with grief; but still

he bowed to God's judgment and said, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!'

But fresh sorrow and grievous suffering came to him, and his patience gave way under repeated trials, so that he wished he had never been born, and lamented that ever he saw the light; 'for now,' he says, 'I should have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept; then had I been at rest:' for 'there the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest; there the prisoners rest together: they hear not the voice of the oppressor.' Still he acknowledges throughout the justice and omnipotent power of God. 'He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him and hath prospered? Which removeth mountains, and they know not; which overturneth them in his anger; which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea.'

So bitterly he suffered, so hopelessly his spirit fell, that he says, 'My soul is weary

of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself. I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.' His sorrows were almost more than his mortal strength could bear, and but for that faith and strength of love to God, of which there is an under-current in his saddest lamentation, he must have been completely overwhelmed. He was tried in the furnace of affliction, but came out purified; and God accepted him, and blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning. He had flocks and herds in abundance, and more children were born to him; and he was allowed a long period of life in which to enjoy these blessings.

Let his life be a proof to us that the darkest hour will have an end; that if we bear ourselves as God would have us in the times of trial and affliction, which come alike to all, He will tide us through those weary times; and though our hearts may be sad and breaking, though we may long in our despair to flee away and be at rest, still our burden will not be greater than we can bear; and rest will come at last, com-

fort will come in this world if we seek it aright, and a long and glorious rest will be ours for ever in those many mansions where Christ is 'gone to prepare a place for us, that where He is we may be also.'

READING XXII.

ECCLESIASTES, ix. 18.

WISDOM is better than weapons of war : but one sinner destroyeth much good.

IN another verse of the Bible we are told that ‘the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.’ Otherwise we might say that this great quality, which is better than weapons of war, is only for those who have time and leisure to study and obtain wisdom and knowledge, while others labour to procure the necessaries of life. But it is not so : this wisdom is something which is open, and in this civilised country is offered to us all. All alike, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, clever and ignorant, all are alike called to the knowledge of God.

And here I would lay stress upon a

point which is sometimes not understood, and that is the absolute meaning of the words so often used in Scripture, 'the *fear* of God.' It does not mean that dread or terror which is the common acceptance of the word 'fear.' That which we fear in that sense we should shrink from and avoid ; but it should convey to us rather the idea of such reverence for a superior Being as should induce us to dread offending Him, or grieving Him by disobedience or neglect. Supposing there was a person on earth whom we looked up to, and loved, and respected more than others ; the stronger our love for him the greater would be our reverence, and our fear of displeasing him : we should not avoid and keep away from his presence, but, as long at least as we could come with a clear conscience, we should rejoice in being near him, and take pleasure in every opportunity we could find of gratifying and serving him. And this is the feeling we should have towards God ; a feeling that should draw us towards Him, and at the same time give us a constant

sense that we must more and more endeavour to be worthy of His great love and fatherly care : for as the preacher Ecclesiastes says, 'Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter : Fear God and keep his commandments ; for this is the whole duty of man.'

And this is the true wisdom, the wisdom that will stand us in good stead when everything else fails us. When the daylight deepens, and the sight of those whom we have loved and rested on fades from our dying eyes, when worldly wisdom is as nought, and all our riches can do no more for us ; then, if we have sought and obtained the true wisdom which never perishes, we shall be supported and strengthened, and the grave and gate of death will be only a step from this world to a better and more enduring kingdom. Death will be robbed of its terrors, and darkness will be turned into eternal day.

But if we seek for this happiness at last, and God grant that we may all be seeking for it now, while it is called To-day, we must also remember the latter part of the text,—

‘but one sinner destroyeth much good.’ One wrong-doer, one little sin, may do an infinite amount of harm : not to the sinner only, whose soul, if unrepenting, it will lose, but to those around him. For the consequences of sin are incalculable, and the downward path of evil is terribly easy to follow. Once the wide gate is passed, the course is but too plain. A second temptation is never so hard to resist when the first has prevailed, and like a sound, which once uttered makes a motion in the air which goes on and on through all time, so with sin and error. There is no possibility of following out the long effects of one wrong act, but be assured that they will be reckoned up against us by God, and we shall be terror-stricken when we see written in the Book of Judgment the evils that have sprung from one fault, little heeded at the time, perhaps, but productive of wide-spread ill.

Like the little springs in the hills trickling down the mountain-sides, which a man would step over and scarce look at, but which make as they flow on a wide river,

and then spread themselves into a vast lake ; so with little sins,—small, unnoticed at first, but gradually increasing, till at last they drag down the soul by their strength, and overwhelm and destroy it for ever. The tide of sin must be stemmed early before it is too strong for us, and only by the wisdom of God it is that the weakness of man gains strength for the task.

READING XXIII.

PSALM xxiii. 1, 2.

THE Lord is my shepherd ; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures : he leadeth me beside the still waters.

IN the Eastern countries where our Lord spent the time which He passed on earth, taking our nature upon Him, a great part of the riches of the people consisted in flocks and herds. We know this especially of Abraham and Lot, and many others of the great men of whom we read in the Old Testament ; and as it was in their day, so it was in our Saviour's time, and so indeed it still is among the wandering tribes of Asia up to the present time, the manners and customs of the inhabitants of the East having changed wonderfully little. Modern

travellers tell us that they find whole tribes living in tents, watching vast flocks of sheep and goats, and herds of cattle and horses, and still retaining the old laws of hospitality which we read of in the books of Moses ; so much so that these customs explain passages in the Bible which might otherwise be obscure, and help to prove (if proof were wanting) the truth and accuracy of Bible story.

Therefore shepherds were well known among them, and were people of great importance, as they held in their hands the power of preserving and increasing their masters' flocks and herds, and so of augmenting their riches. The shepherd's importance to the sheep themselves was untold, for on his watchfulness and care depended not only their lives, but also their daily food and hourly support. His care it was to lead them to green pastures, and his to give them water to drink ; and in that parched and dry land it needed knowledge and thought to drive those vast multitudes of thirsty animals to the cool and refreshing

rills, where they could quench their thirst, and be safe from the wolves and other wild beasts who might be lurking there to spring upon them. All this depended on the shepherd ; and where, therefore, would our Lord find a comparison which more clearly and beautifully showed His constant, unremitting care for His people, not only for their wants, but for their protection and safety ?

David was able to say, ‘The Lord is my shepherd,’ and indeed the mercies that were shown to David were many and great ; often had he strayed from the fold, but each time the Shepherd had followed him and brought him back ; and throughout those Psalms which were written by him we find constant expressions of his thankfulness to God for leading him in the right path, preserving him from trouble and danger ; and even to the end his reliance is on his Shepherd : for he says, ‘Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil : for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.’

The similitude therefore of a shepherd was one which all the ignorant people, the Jews and Pharisees to whom our Saviour spoke after He had given sight to the blind man, could easily understand. He spoke to an impatient, uproarious crowd, who took up stones to stone Him ; and at such a time He would use the plainest words, those that would go straight to the hearts and understandings of those whom He sought to teach. And though many were there who scoffed at Him, and said ‘ He is mad,’ yet the gentle words went home to some ; for St. John says ‘ there was a division among the Jews ;’ and while some refused to hear Him, others said, ‘ These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind ?’

Those words are handed down to us for our learning ; and a comforting thought it is that we have a Shepherd to look to, who when we are weary will make us to lie down in green pastures, who will refresh us beside the still waters, and in our last passage through the valley of death will

still be there with His shepherd's staff to guide us. He asks our love ; He asks us to look to Him, with thankfulness in our prosperity, with prayer in our tribulation ; and there is no fear for us : ' For the Lamb which is the midst of the throne shall feed us, and shall lead us to living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes.'

READING XXIV.

ISAIAH, ix. 2.

THE people that walked in darkness have seen a great light : they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

THE Book of the Prophet Isaiah is written with the chief purpose of showing the people among whom he dwelt the wickedness of their doings, their iniquity and forgetfulness of God, and the terrible evils that would fall upon them if they did not repent and turn from their evil ways. He warns them earnestly, and reminds them of the wonders God wrought in times past ; and yet, while assuring them that ‘There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked,’ he holds out to them, to encourage their better aspirations, the promise of a

Saviour who should 'swallow up death in victory.'

The prophet lived in the days of one of the good kings of Judah, Hezekiah, and he it was who foretold the manner in which his country would be delivered from the conquering army of Sennacherib, by the miraculous destruction, which almost immediately took place, of the whole Assyrian army, when the angel of death passed over them in the night.

Many of Isaiah's prophecies are difficult to understand, but they become more clear to us if read in conjunction with the latter part of the Second Book of Kings, and of Chronicles, which give the history of the stormy and troubled times in which he lived, and where we find the first mention of Isaiah himself. He lived about seven hundred and sixty years before the birth of Christ, and in almost every chapter there is some reference to this event. Sometimes it is dimly shadowed forth, as in the second chapter, where he says, 'And many people shall go and say,

Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.' The ancient law had been given to Moses in the wilderness, and this, then, must refer to the law of Christ, or the Gospel dispensation, which would emanate from Jerusalem.

Then again, after a lament over the troubles that were to come upon Judah by the hand of the King of Assyria, whom he compares to the waters of a river, strong and mighty, flowing over all his banks and overwhelming the breadth of the land, he turns with inspired hope to the future, saying, 'The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light . . . for unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, henceforth even for ever.'

To understand the full power of this prophecy we must remember not only the number of years that had yet to elapse before its accomplishment, but also that at the time it was spoken a very small proportion of the known world worshipped the true God in any degree—only the descendants of Jacob; for all the rest of the world were idolaters, some adoring the sun, some fire, some images of wood or stone: and even they, the descendants of Jacob, frequently relapsed into the idolatry of the nations around them. Therefore, 'that of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end,' seemed impossible then; but we see now, in our day, the fulfilment of those words.

As Isaiah, in his inspired soul, could look beyond the desolation that was to

afflict his country to the birth of a Saviour, so we, when sorrow and darkness oppress us, can look beyond the warfare of the world to the kingdom of peace and rest, which Christ's coming has purchased for us.

READING XXV.

ISAIAH, xl. 6.

All flesh is grass.

IT is not very often, in the middle of an active life, that men pause in their business and think that, however absorbing it is, it is really a thing of time only—a thing that will pass away, and in a few years will leave no record; that what engrosses every minute of their time now will then be as nothing; that the hope of earthly happiness and prosperity, which they are now straining every nerve to realise, will, soon after they have grasped it, fly from them for ever; that what now seems to them the greatest joy of earth (and to most men that joy lies in the success of whatever they are undertaking), that that joy will be but like the great treasure

which the rich man gathered in barns, and will be worth no more than dust and ashes when the grim figure of Death approaches and says, 'This night thy soul will be required of thee.'

Surely our life here, if we regarded it in its true light, as a blade of grass that grows up in the morning, for a short time is bright, and green, and beautiful, and then fades away; surely this short time on earth is not worth the depth of sorrow, and the restless wear and tear of anxiety, which some bestow upon it, intent only upon that beacon, 'success,' without weighing the value of that which will endure for ages beyond the power of counting—even for that immeasurable space, eternity!

It is not that we must neglect the things of the world, far from it. Talents are not given us to be laid up in a napkin, but to be made the most of, to be used to the glory of God and the good of our fellow-men; and then, while working through our daily life, if we do each thing that comes before us on a good principle—

the one great principle of doing what is right before God—then we shall be laying up store for eternity.

When the last trumpet sounds, when death comes to us, as come it must to all, how bitter will be our last moments if we then feel that we have given nothing to the God who has given us everything! If we have nothing to urge at the judgment-seat of God! If all our time has been given to securing the welfare of that body we shall then have left behind in the grave, and no thought given to our soul, which is created to last for ever—not to perish like the grass of the field, but to exist for future ages in joy or in anguish unspeakable, according to the deeds we have done in the flesh!

This life is only a short period, in which we must prepare for a long reward; a time of probation which God has given us, that we may work out our salvation with fear and trembling; but still with earnest faith, and hope, and confidence, that a God of love is more willing to save than

to destroy, and that 'there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety-and-nine just persons that need no repentance.'

This ought to encourage us never to despair, but to remember that it was for sinners that Christ died—for such as us. But let us not put off the day of turning to God, lest it be too late, and we find those precious moments in which we might have sought and found forgiveness are gone by, and that sorrow, and not joy, is our portion for ever. May God in His mercy grant that such may not be our fate, but that we may so pass through this life that we fail not finally to attain to things eternal, where 'God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.'

READING XXVI.

ISAIAH, lv. 6.

SEEK ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.

BESIDES the judgments pronounced on Israel for their pride, hypocrisy, and impenitence, Isaiah foretells the total destruction of other cities also ; all of which came to pass. Babylon, one of the most powerful, proud, and rich cities of the East, and at that time, apparently, one of the most prosperous, for it is called ‘ the glory of kingdoms and the beauty of the Chaldee’s excellency,’ was repeatedly threatened with the direst overthrow by the Lord.

The province of Babylon was the abode of the wildest wickedness and idolatry, for

it was there, in the plain of Dura, that Nebuchadnezzar set up his golden image, with the stringent order that all were to worship it or be cast into a burning fiery furnace. The worship of idols, so strictly forbidden in the second commandment, was, in the sight of God, a most heinous sin, and one which invariably brought retribution on the transgressor; for 'God is a jealous God,' and the worship that was due to Him alone could not with impunity be transferred to idols, the work of men's hands. Therefore of Babylon, the golden city, it is prophesied that it 'shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation, neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there, neither shall shepherds make folds there, and wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate homes, and dragons in their pleasant palaces, and it shall be a possession for the bittern.'

A strange contrast from the height of luxury and revelry to the wildest of desolation! In the place of the feasts of the

princes robed in purple and gold there should be the wild beast, and the bird that frequents lonely, uncultivated places—the bittern; with the hot sand of the desert sweeping over and burying the remains of the walls and palaces.

And all came literally to pass; for Babylon is now little more than a name and a tradition. Enormous walls have been traced beneath the sand, which are supposed to have been the boundary of that once prosperous city; but it is the habitation of the wild beast only, for no town has risen on its ruins, no vestige of its magnificence remains. On Tyre also was the vengeance of God poured out, and the total fall of Assyria is distinctly foretold. Nothing can stand against the wrath of God. But sure as is His justice, so sure is also His mercy. The words which Isaiah spoke respecting the birth of a Redeemer, a theme on which he loved to dwell, have been as literally fulfilled as the fall of Babylon. He who foretold the destruction of Sennacherib's mighty army,

the accomplishment of which the prophet saw in a few short hours, also spoke the words of hope and consolation,—‘Comfort ye, comfort ye my people. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.’

And he it was who repeats the gracious invitation,—‘Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy wine and milk without money and without price.’

The invitation is free and open to all, and is surely one not to be disregarded. Babylon, Tyre, and Assyria, and all the nations that forgot God, were composed of individuals, and had but some of them repented and turned from their evil ways God would, no doubt (for in other cases it was so), have spared them, and saved them from the terrible fate that threatened them. Each single person had then, as each of us has now, weight in the scale that makes a nation; and, both for our country’s sake and for our own, let not

the words of God go unheeded too long,—
'Let the wicked forsake his way, and
the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let
him return unto the Lord, and he will have
mercy on him; and to our God, for he
will abundantly pardon.'

READING XXVII.

JEREMIAH, xxix. 12, 13.

THEN shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

AFTER the Book of Isaiah follows another book of prophecy, and also of the accomplishment of prophecy, written by Jeremiah, who lived about one hundred years after Isaiah, and was, like him, frequently sent for by the Kings of Judah to succour and advise them against the enemies who threatened their country. Jeremiah's heart must have been full of sadness, for he knew beforehand the terrible overthrow of Israel which was at hand, the afflictions which were about to fall upon the Jews, and the long captivity in Babylon, which was each day

becoming more imminent ; for there are few circumstances in life more trying or more sad than to know that evil is impending, and to be powerless to prevent it. In ordinary life, foreknowledge only amounts to expectation or fear, and with those feelings always comes hope ; to which, to the last moment, humanity ever clings : but to the inspired prophet there could be no such feeling. Calamity was at hand, and not only near, but certain. The words which he spoke foreshadowing seventy years of captivity to a hostile and tyrannical king were the words of God, and therefore both true and irrevocable.

Zedekiah was the last king of Judah, and he was then reigning, and had shut up the prophet in a prison in Jerusalem, at the time that the city was being besieged by the King of Babylon. But even in prison the word of the Lord came to him, — ‘ Behold, I will give this city into the hands of the Chaldeans, and into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it.’

Then comes the consolation, and the promise of release from captivity,—‘And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them as at the first.’ And in another place it is distinctly related to Jeremiah that the duration of the subjugation of the Jews to their enemies should be for a limited period only ; for in the first year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, before he brought his armies to Jerusalem, we read that the word of the Lord came to the prophet, ‘And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the King of Babylon seventy years.’ At the end of this time Babylon, the golden city, was herself to perish in her turn for her wickedness : but the sentence against her was without hope, she had no prospect of being re-established, there was no period that would end her total desolation.

Jeremiah, however, is enabled to look beyond those dreary years of fightings, of warfare, and destruction, to the days of the

Prince of Peace, for he says,—‘The days come, saith the Lord, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and of Judah. In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David, and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah shall be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely.’

Jeremiah, from the darkness of his prison, could look forward to the day, nearly six hundred years off, when a Saviour should be born into the world, whom the ‘wise men of the East, supposed to be Sages from Chaldea, the very country of the Jews’ captivity, should come to worship, with rich offerings of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. They took a long and dreary journey to look on Him whom they already loved. Let us not refuse to see Him with the eye of faith, that, in due time, we may see Him as He is.

READING XXVIII.

DANIEL, ii. 20.

DANIEL answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever : for wisdom and might are his.

THE history of Daniel comes next in the order of events to the prophecy of Jeremiah, because in the time of the latter Jerusalem was taken and the Jews led prisoners to Babylon, and the Book of Daniel refers to events which took place during the captivity. Daniel himself was one of the children of Judah, a son of one of the royal houses, and with three companions of similar rank was taken into the palace of the Babylonish king, to be instructed in the learning of the Chaldeans, who were of great repute among the nations for their science and knowledge.

The first thing we learn of Daniel's doings there betokened great strength of character in one so young.

He refused to eat of the king's meat and wine which were provided for him, because they were not prepared according to the laws of the Jews, which are very strict on the subject of food; and rather than transgress the command of Moses, in obedience to whose laws lay the foundation of his faith, he preferred pulse to eat and water to drink. At the end of the three years which were devoted to learning the wisdom of the Chaldeans, these four youths, Daniel, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were brought before the king, and were found more fair and well-favoured than those who had fed from the king's table; and also 'in all matters of wisdom and understanding that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.'

Aided by their God, the true God, who reserved them to show forth His power to

the heathen, they were enabled to interpret the dreams of the king, when the wise men of the country proved unable to satisfy Nebuchadnezzar, so that he decreed the death of them all. Daniel, by the inspiration of God, told the king the dream he had dreamed, and also the interpretation. It was a wondrous dream, foreshadowing the fate of great Babylon : but when Daniel told the king, word for word, the vision of the dream he had forgotten, as it all came back to him he was so astounded that he fell on his face, and worshipped Daniel, and said to him, 'Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret.' Daniel immediately came to great honour, for the king 'made him governor over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.'

And here his history reminds us much of that of Joseph. Daniel was a captive in a foreign land ; Joseph, a prisoner in Egypt. Both were permitted by their God to bring

themselves into notice by their monarchs' dreams. Daniel was made governor of Babylon, and Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled ; only in the throne will I be greater than thou. I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.'

Joseph governed Egypt and died there, but Daniel had much to bear and suffer after his advancement to such high authority.

But we should here pause, and consider the truth of the words in the second commandment, 'The Lord thy God is a jealous God,' as exemplified by this first great incident in Daniel's career. All the wise men, when required to tell the king's dream, betook themselves to their arts of magic, to their consultations with the stars, and their heathen gods : but all in vain ; for God had sent this extraordinary dream to the king, and had then caused him to forget it—all but the strong impression of wonder and curiosity which remained—in order to show

the inefficiency and vanity of their devices, and lead them to seek out Daniel, His faithful servant, that he might bring even that proud monarch of the proudest city on the earth on his face before Him, confessing that the God of Israel was God of gods and Lord of kings.

READING XXIX.

MATTHEW, xxiv. 13.

BUT he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

THE elevation of Daniel's three companions to be governors of Babylon, and the high favour in which they stood with Nebuchadnezzar, naturally made them objects of great jealousy to the people around them. The mind of man is naturally so illiberal and so ungenerous, that even the most deserving can hardly receive the honour due to their merits without creating in the hearts of those who, having less merit are consequently less successful, the bitterest envy and hatred. As they cannot attain the same heights themselves, their immediate desire is to detract from the characters

of others, and by every means to endeavour to bring them down from their high estate.

In the case of Daniel and his fellow-captives there was a particular cause for special hatred and jealousy,—they were not of themselves; they were foreigners, prisoners of war, worshippers of another God. Therefore there were not wanting among the Chaldeans many who were ready to take advantage of their fidelity to their God to bring them into disfavour with the king. But their evil desires turned to good, and became the occasion of another special miracle, which was to show still more convincingly to the heathen monarch that the God of Israel was God of gods and Lord of kings.

An enormous golden image was made and set up in the plain of Dura, and by a herald, the command of the great king, all-powerful as he deemed himself, was read in the ears of all the people, in the high-flown language of the East,—‘To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, that at what time ye hear the sound

of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up. And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.'

This was a test of loyalty to the king. In the midst of a great plain of sand stood the golden image, of gigantic height, glowing like fire beneath the rays of an Arabian sun; and to it trooped in thousands the inhabitants of the proud city of Babylon, and of all the towns around—rich and poor, in all varieties of costume, men, women, and children, all hastening to obey the summons of the king. Surely the three governors of Babylon should have been amongst the foremost to obey the behest of the king, who had done so much for their advancement? But, no! their duty was to a yet greater King—to the Lord of kings Himself; and mindful of the words graven on a tablet of stone, and delivered on the sacred mount Sinai to Moses, their

lawgiver, forbidding them to bow down to any graven image whatever, they refrained from falling down before the idol, braving rather the danger of the burning furnace. Then those Chaldeans, jealous of the position of the stranger Jews, hastened to tell the king that 'those men, O King, have not regarded thee ; they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.' In rage and fury at this disobedience and disrespect, the king summoned Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to his presence, and bidding them instantly worship his image, asks with sarcastic scorn, 'And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?'

They answer, that the God whom they serve is able to deliver them from the fiery furnace. And Nebuchadnezzar, full of fury, commanded the most mighty men in his army to cast them bound into the furnace, made seven times hotter than it was wont to be heated. This was done, and the mighty men were slain by the flames as they cast the three martyrs into the fire.

The soldiers perished, but the three men were cast in bound. The king rose up in haste, and said, 'I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.' And in the presence of the princes, counsellors, and all the great men of Babylon, the three servants of the Most High God came forth unhurt out of the fire. And again the king was forced to confess and acknowledge the true God, saying, 'Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego! for there is no other God that can deliver after this sort.' Theirs, indeed, was the faith that can remove mountains.

READING XXX.

DANIEL, iv. 35.

HE doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

TWICE had Nebuchadnezzar confessed that there was no god like the true God. He had passed a decree, that he who spake anything amiss of the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, should be cut in pieces; but his heart was not yet turned in sincerity to God, though his reason was convinced. It needed yet another proof, a stronger token of God's power, than any that had yet been vouchsafed to man, to humble the pride of this king.

The miracles and signs wrought by

Moses, even the ten plagues brought on the country, had not softened Pharaoh's heart. And neither the miraculous manner in which Daniel had told and interpreted his dream, nor the sight of the true-hearted Jews walking unharmed in the burning furnace of fire, had sufficed to bring Nebuchadnezzar to the unfeigned worship of the God of Israel. One more, one extraordinary, one personal proof of God's might, was needed, and that one was now sent. Nebuchadnezzar, overcome by the wonder of another vision, made a public oration to his people, beginning with a voluntary testimony to the greatness of God. 'I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the High God hath wrought toward me. How great are His signs! and how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation.' He then proceeds to recount a dream, which made him afraid and troubled him, but which all his magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans and soothsayers, failed to interpret, till Daniel,

‘in whom is the spirit of the holy Gods,’ came before him, and to him he told his vision. He had seen a high tree grow up out of the earth, a mighty tree, which reached to heaven, covered with leaves and with much fruit, and the beasts of the field rejoiced in the shade of it, the birds dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh fed off it. But the great tree was hewn down, and the stump was left in the ground, bound with an iron band; the heart was changed from a man’s, and a beast’s heart was given it; and seven times should pass over it. When the king called upon Daniel to give him the explanation of this remarkable dream the prophet was much troubled, and was astonished for one hour. And we cannot but feel that he must have shrunk from telling the king, whose actions to him had been characterised by invariable kindness, of the horrible fate that he but too clearly saw awaited him. Even then, the king spoke words of gentleness to him: he said, ‘Let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee.’ And then

Daniel, constrained to speak out, endeavoured to mitigate the first shock, by showing in his first sentence that the meaning was one for his foes, not his friends, to rejoice at. ‘My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies.’ The interpretation is best given in the original words. After explaining that the tree was the emblem of the king himself, whose greatness reached to heaven, he says, ‘They shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen. They shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men : He giveth it to whomsoever He will. And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots, thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule. Wherefore, O King, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities

by showing mercy to the poor ; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.'

All this came to pass. At the end of twelve months, while walking in the palace of Babylon and extolling his own greatness, the dread sentence fell upon him, and he left his magnificence and his glory behind him, and ate grass like the oxen under the dew of heaven.

For seven years his reason and understanding left him, and in a state of madness he wandered among the beasts of the field. Then his reason returned, more perfect than before ; for his eyes were opened, his heart was melted, and as he himself expresses it, 'the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and my brightness, returned to me.' He became a believer in the true God of Israel, and thus was a heart, hard as the nether millstone, brought to a knowledge of God : he was like refined gold that had been purified seven times in the fire. And though miracles such as these do not happen in our day, yet trials and afflictions are sent to us, to draw us nearer to God ; and well will it be

for us if we attend betimes to Daniel's counsel, 'and break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, that it may be a lengthening of our tranquillity.'

READING XXXI.

DANIEL, vi. 27.

HE delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

OF Daniel one more narrative is given. Darius the Mede had thus suddenly taken the city of Babylon, by entering it in the darkness of night, while the people were reckless and wild with feasting, along the bed of the great river Euphrates, the waters of which he had diverted into another course. The river flowed through the great and strong wall, of which traces are still found buried under the sand—the only remains of that vain-glorious city ; and of course, therefore, when once the waters were drawn off, an easy access to the city was afforded.

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Darius, the leader of the enterprise, was doubtless aware of the great festival that Belshazzar had prepared, and knew that that night would be favourable for the execution of his project. We learn the result in two short verses,—‘In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain; and Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.’

The reputation of Daniel was so high that the conqueror knew how to appreciate his great talents, and at once made him the chief of the three presidents whom he set over the hundred and twenty princes to govern the province of Babylon.

Once more placed on a pinnacle, he was again the object of the jealousy of those around him, and as they had sought to undermine the influence of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego through their faith in their God, so, on the same grounds, they insidiously winged their shaft at Daniel. Even his enemies paid an involuntary tribute to his excellence when they said, ‘We

shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.' In the malice of their hearts they conceived the idea of persuading the king to make a royal statute and a firm decree, that 'Whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O King, he shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O King, establish the decree and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.'

In order that it might not be supposed that Daniel's faithful worship of his God was continued in ignorance of this proclamation we are expressly told that when he 'knew that the writing was signed he went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a-day, and prayed and gave thanks to God as he did aforetime.'

There is a whole history in this one verse. We see that he had learned the

cruel decree, prompted, as he must at once have felt, by the envy and jealousy of his enemies. But, though aware of the snare prepared for him, there is no hesitation. The greater his danger, the greater his need of intercourse with the God of his fathers. He went, we are told, into his house, and there his windows were open towards Jerusalem. How strongly this speaks of the yearning of his heart towards that sacred city ! An exile from his country, a great man in a foreign land, those few words tell us that he never forgot his own home—the home of his fathers, and the only country in which the law of God was obeyed and His worship performed in His holy Temple.

At least, with his windows open towards Jerusalem, he might breathe the same air that had ruffled the surface of Jordan, and rocked the oleanders on Mount Olivet, and passed over the roof of cedar and gold of the Temple of Solomon.

There, in his hour of threatened adversity, with the calmness of a true believer,

he prayed, and gave thanks to his God, as he did aforetime. There was none of the glory of self-sacrifice, no ostentation of martyrdom, in Daniel's conduct. He only prayed as he did aforetime.

The king, when the princes hastened to inform him, with pretended loyalty, of the success of this manœuvre, was sore displeased with himself, and laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him ; for the kings of the Persians could not, by their law, revoke their own orders. All he could do, and more none could have done, was to remind Daniel, as he was cast into the den of hungry lions, 'Thy God, whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.' Daniel truly came forth unharmed, and again a Babylonish king published a decree, commanding his subjects 'to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel.'

After this Daniel saw many visions, and gave utterance to many prophecies ; he remained in high favour with the kings of the country, where he is believed to have died, and his grave at Susa attracts pilgrims

to this day. His life has many beautiful lessons for us. None, perhaps, more touching than his calm perseverance in daily prayer to his God, with his windows open towards Jerusalem.

Let us, too, fix our thoughts on our heavenly Jerusalem, our eternal home ; and when our hour of danger and temptation comes our God, too, will shut the mouths of the lions, and will send His angel to deliver us.

READING XXXII.

MARK, xiii. 33.

Watch and pray.

OF Belshazzar, another king of the Chaldeans, we have the history of one event only, but it is one of sufficient magnitude to make his name remembered through all ages.

In the same palace where such strange evidences of God's power had been experienced by Nebuchadnezzar as to turn him from idolatry to the true faith, Belshazzar was presiding at a feast of unparalleled magnificence. A thousand of his princes and nobles ate and drank with him, and the revelry and profanity ran high ; for, as the king drank, he commanded that the vessels of gold and silver should be

brought which had formed part of the spoil at the taking of Jerusalem. These were no ordinary vessels ; they had been consecrated to the service of the Almighty God in the sacred Temple of Solomon. In these the king and his impious company drank, and drank to their idols—gods of gold, of silver, and of brass, iron, wood, and stone. Sacrilege so fearful could not remain unpunished ; and even then, when the revels were at their height, the justice of God was impending. ‘ In the same hour came forth fingers of a man’s hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace ; and the king saw part of the hand that wrote.’

No wonder that a dreadful terror fell upon him ! No wonder that his countenance was changed, that his thoughts troubled him, and his knees smote one against the other ! Though he could not read the writing, his conscience spoke.

Even then, had not his whole soul been absorbed in the profane revelry of this

feast, he might have heard the army of his earthly conqueror advancing to his city walls. But it was now too late, the sentence had been pronounced.

As in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, no one of the wise men could be found to interpret, till, once more, Daniel was called in; and the king, again paying him the same tribute that his predecessor had been constrained to express, says 'that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light, and understanding, and excellent wisdom is found in thee.' Further he says, 'If thou canst read the writing, and make known the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom.'

Daniel knew too well the vanity and insufficiency of earthly grandeur to covet these rewards, and answered the king: 'Let thy gifts be to another, yet I will read the writing to the king and make known the interpretation.' Then he reminds him of the warnings he has had in seeing the

judgment of God on Nebuchadnezzar, who 'was driven out from the sons of men, and dwelt with the wild asses, eating grass like oxen, till he knew that the Most High God ruled in the kingdom of men. And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thy heart, though thou knewest all this ; but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of Heaven. And thou hast praised the gods of silver and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know : and the God in whose hand thy breath is, in whom are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified. And this is the meaning that was written :—MENE ; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL ; thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting. PERES ; thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.'

We read nothing of the effect these words had on the king, but they must have been fearful to him. Was his magnificence, his grandeur, and his glory, greater *than that* of the kings of the earth, to be

wrested from him by a God whom he did not even acknowledge ?

He could not despise the words of Daniel, for had not every token and wonder he had foretold before come true ? No time for doubt, no choice of repentance was given him ; for that very night Babylon, the golden city, fell before Darius the Mede, and Belshazzar the king was slain : weighed in the balance and found wanting, his soul was summoned before his Judge, his offended Judge.

Sudden as was his summons, ours may be as sudden, without the warning of a strange writing on the wall ; the sentence may already have gone forth for any one of us—‘This night thy soul shall be required of thee.’ Let us ‘watch, therefore, lest, coming suddenly, he find us sleeping. And what I say, I say unto all, Watch.’

READING XXXIII.

Amos, iv. 12.

Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel !

THE Book of Daniel is followed in the Bible by the works of several minor prophets, whose mission seems to have been chiefly to denounce God's wrath against different countries, where the people were either worshippers of idols, or, as in the case of Israel, worshippers of God outwardly, who in their hearts neglected the law of Moses, and despised the faith of their forefathers.

Still, to Israel and Judah special hope is always held out, that their sorrows will have an end, and that better and brighter *days* are in store for them ; that their

desolation will be done away and their prosperity restored. But to the heathen nations there is no prospect of salvation. As the children of Israel by degrees annihilated the idolatrous Canaanites, so these heathen tribes were also to pass away from the face of the earth.

Hosea, Joel, and Amos, are full of prophetic denunciations; in the latter, however, are words of solemn appeal to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and earnest exhortations to repentance. The Book of Jonah, and that of the Prophet Nahum, contain especial reference to one of the greatest and strongest cities of old time, the town of Nineveh. It is described as 'an exceeding great city, of three days' journey.' There are many remains of it now; traces of gigantic walls and buildings, and engraved stones, have been found there, throwing much light on the history of the nations in Jonah's time, and before him, and giving in many instances clear corroboration of the Bible accounts. To it, in all its pride, was Jonah sent, to

pour out the vials of God's vengeance on the city of power and wickedness. Jonah is believed to have lived about eight hundred years before Christ, and probably about the same time that Jehu was king of Israel, and a short time after the tragic death of Ahab and Jezebel. His story scarcely needs repetition. We know of his craven heart, which, when sent to tell the doom of Nineveh, led him to seek to flee from the presence of the Lord.

He took ship to Tarshish from Joppa, forgetting how idle a hope it was, either by sea or land, by day or night, to escape from his Creator. And he soon found it so, for the Lord sent a great wind over the sea, and a mighty tempest, so that the ship was like to be broken. Willing to try every resource they could think of for their safety, the frightened mariners even called upon Jonah, who was sleeping, 'What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.' Their own gods gave them no help, and they

had no faith in Jonah's. They cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah; but when he told them that he feared his God and fled from Him they were exceedingly afraid. He desired them to cast him into the sea, and they, beseeching God not to let them perish for this man's life, took up Jonah and cast him forth into the sea, and the sea ceased from raging.

But Jonah's mission was yet to be accomplished, the doom of Nineveh to be pronounced. A great fish swallowed up Jonah, and after three days, and after earnest prayer to God, he was again put forth on dry land; for a great work was to be done, and done by the preaching of Jonah. He went as the Lord led him, to proclaim in the ears of all the sixscore thousand people the sentence on the city, — 'Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.'

But so prompt and so sincere was the penitence of the inhabitants, who proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the highest to the lowest—for the king

himself left his throne and sat in ashes—that ‘God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented him of the evil that he had said he would do unto them, and he did it not.’

To this our Saviour refers when the Pharisees asked for a sign, and He replied, ‘The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold, a greater than Jonas is here.’ Let us beware that Nineveh rise not in judgment on our generation, for we, too, have words of warning and words of heavenly love from a greater than Jonas,—from Him who said, ‘I am not come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.’

READING XXXIV.

MATTHEW, v. 4.

Blessed are they that mourn.

WORDS which sound almost like a contradiction. And yet, who had better authority to speak on such a subject than our Saviour, who had probed the depths of human suffering and woe? But for His knowledge of that bitterness hardly would He have left His throne at God's right hand in heaven, the kingdom of perfect bliss, to make such retribution, by His own sacrifice of Himself, as should relieve us from the penalty of sin; thus bringing comfort to those that mourn.

Is there a worse sorrow than the sorrow for sin? Ruin may overtake us, tried and

trusted friends may deceive us, or death may tear them from our side; but if we have to lay blame on ourselves, if we must justly condemn our own conduct, how infinitely harder is it to bear than if we had only to submit to misfortune and say, 'It is the will of God!' But 'the wages of sin is death.' The penalty is grievous; and how much more bitter will it be, if at the last we feel that we might have secured God's gift of eternal life, had we but repented in time! If we put off our contrition and do not turn to God till it be too late, the blessedness of those that mourn will never be experienced by us.

Prosperous as the outward lives of many appear, all have their trials; while those who are now in tribulation are perhaps more to be envied, as they are already weathering the storm and working their way towards the Haven which, with God's help, they will reach at last. With God's help, which is never withheld from those who ask it. There are no truer words than 'Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall

find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' For if we ask in faith, nothing doubting, our prayers will be granted sooner or later, directly or indirectly, in God's own divine way. Not, it is likely enough, just in the manner we expect; but perhaps before this short life is over we may discern what was the error of our way, and acknowledge the fatherly kindness and wisdom of the omnipotent judgment of God.

Sorrow may rise up as a thunder-cloud, and may so weigh down and darken our path that we may be unable to see the light beyond; our earthly hopes may turn to bitter disappointment, and then we shall feel to the full that our only support lies in God's mercy, our only consolation in His Book, our only happy prospect in eternal rest in His kingdom: and it is then that such words as these will ring in our ears as they never rang before, and 'Blessed are they that mourn,' will come fraught with truth, and hope, and renewed strength.

As the water from the rock which flowed in streams at the touch of Moses

reinvigorated thirsty multitudes, so will these consoling words restore our sinking faith, reanimate our trembling hearts, and enable us to fight that battle of life in which, through Christ, we shall at last be more than conquerors.

As St. James says, 'Take, my brethren, the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord for an example of suffering affliction and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord ; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy.'

READING XXXV.

MATTHEW, ix. 2.

AND Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer ; thy sins be forgiven thee.

IN this narrative, which contains a record of one of our Saviour's miracles of mercy, there are one or two points which are best explained by a description of the style of building of Eastern houses. All these houses have flat roofs, and on these roofs it was the custom of the inhabitants to meet together and enjoy the open air of heaven when the sun had gone down behind the Galilean hills, and the evening shadows brought a cool freshness after the hot glare of the day. In the centre of the building

was generally a small, open, square court, which was often screened from the sun during the daytime by an awning of some kind of cloth or canvas spread over it.

In one of these houses, then, in the village of Capernaum, our Saviour was preaching to a large number of eager hearers; and the news no doubt had spread that One was there who could heal the sick. Such a moment was not to be lost. This poor cripple, suffering from illness which the learned of his country could not cure, all helpless as he was, implored his friends to carry him to the feet of Christ.

And here we see the workings of his faith. A sinner we know he was, suffering and poor, but inspired by hope. He was brought to the house, but others were there before them, and they 'could not get at Him for the press : ' they were not easily deterred, but failing the first simple way of coming to Him they sought other means : and here we find an example for ourselves. In *several* places we are told to be earnest

and persevering in prayer. At first, God may not grant our prayers, and difficulties may discourage us and tire our patience. But the poor sufferer whose history we are now tracing did not so readily give up. They bore him to the flat roof of the house, which was easily attained, and then they tore away the tiles on the roof till an entrance was made over the place where Christ was, and wrapping the sick man in a sheet—very probably the awning which covered the court, and was therefore at hand—they let him down to the Presence where his heart was trying to be.

. How ample was the reward of this perseverance! Our Saviour's words of forgiveness must indeed have been to him the voice of a God. He had been brought there apparently to seek a cure for his physical infirmity, but perhaps he had often raised his voice in earnest prayer for what he knew to be a greater evil still—the disease of his soul. And in answer to those prayers it was that the voice of God spoke to him, 'Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.' Here is a proof

that God alone knows what is our real need, our greatest want, and often His answer to prayer is a response not to the petition of our lips, but to the necessities of our soul.

In this case both blessings were granted, for not only were his sins forgiven but he was cured of his illness ; for, having entered a miserable cripple into the presence of his Redeemer, he now took up his bed and walked. A monument before the eyes of the wondering crowd of the power and the love of the great Teacher who had come among them. But some cavilled because it was beyond their comprehension, and said that none could forgive sins but God alone. In this our Saviour proved to them His Divinity when He said, ' For whether is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee ; or to say, Arise and walk ? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house.'

What must have been the joy of that

poor man, the wonder of that multitude, when before their eyes they saw this instance of the greatness and power of God ! We, too, have but to read and believe. The period of absolute miracles is past, but God's mercy stands fast for ever, and to each one of us the words of love may come, if we pray without ceasing, with patient perseverance ; and we too shall have our own rich reward if we know and feel when our last hour has come that the words have been spoken to our souls, ' Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.'

READING XXXVI.

MATTHEW, xxii. 2, 3.

THE kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding : and they would not come.

IN the parable of the marriage of the King's Son, the kingdom of heaven is put before us under the similitude of a royal feast, which was given by a king in honour of the wedding of his son. Everything was prepared, as the 'many mansions' in heaven are for us; and the hour had arrived for the guests to be summoned, while the king's servants went forth to call them that were bidden. We are bidden to the kingdom of heaven constantly; through our lives are we reminded of that invitation by the mes-

sengers whom God sends forth. His Word is preached to us, His Book is put into all our hands, His Sacraments, His mercies and His judgments alike, all are His messengers, sent to recall our wandering thoughts and to remind us that we are His, and that we are asked to His supper : that is, to be heirs of His kingdom.

If we do not hear the rustle of the angels' wings when they bring us any special mercy, or any grief to bind us closer to God, it is from the hardness of our hearts, and that we turn a deaf ear to the things that concern our salvation.

Of the guests bidden to the marriage some would not come, and other servants were sent forth with a more pressing message. When a trial is sent us, and we neglect the lesson which it conveys; as Pharaoh scorned to obey the commands of God, or to acknowledge His power, till full ten fearful plagues had afflicted his whole country; as Nebuchadnezzar was not converted to God in his heart till he had passed seven long years of raving madness; so it may be

with us. God's hand may lay heavy upon us, and message after message may require to be sent to melt our hard hearts, ere we turn to God in sincerity and truth.

The guests made light of the invitation, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise. Worldly interests came in the way then, as now: that which is immediately before us is more important, we too often think, than the distant prospect of eternity. What is to be done in the world, whether in the way of pleasure or the accumulation of riches, must often, to be effected at all, be carried out at once. Religious thoughts can wait. There will come a time, very likely, when there will be more leisure to attend to them—when our barns are full, our position certain; and then, with minds at ease as to the present, we can think of the future.

But to how many does that time never come? How many are cut off in the midst of their career, by sudden death perhaps, or lingering illness; when, with the weary body racked with pain, the thoughts are little

able to grasp a new subject, to face a future which previous carelessness has made uncertain, if not terrible ?

Too soon we may hear the voice of the King saying, 'The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden are not worthy.' The hour is past, the opportunity lost, the preparation has not been made, and the wedding garment, washed white in the blood of the Lamb, is not ready ; and when the King comes in to see the guests at the Day of Judgment the want of the white garment, the sign of pardon and grace, will condemn the speechless guest. The servants of God, whom he despised before when they came with the first message, will now take possession of him, and, binding him hand and foot, will cast him into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.


Deeply sad and full of warning are the last words of that parable,—'For many are called, but few are chosen.'

READING XXXVII.

MATTHEW, xxvi. 11.

FOR ye have the poor always with you ; but me ye have not always.

IF we study closely the life of our Saviour, we shall find that most of His miracles of healing were performed on the suffering poor, those who had none to help them but God. After the gentle words which our Saviour spoke to His disciples when they rebuked the little children who were brought to Him that He might touch and bless them, ‘Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven,’ showing His love and care for the very feeblest, He went on His way, and a certain ruler asked Him, saying, ‘Good Master, what shall I do to



inherit eternal life ?' Our Saviour bid him obey the commandments he had received from Moses ; and when he replied, ' All these have I kept from my youth up,' Jesus said unto him—and these words are words we dare not forget, though we are not called upon to execute them literally—' Yet lackest thou one thing : Sell all that thou hast and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven ; and come, follow me.'

There is a particular meaning to these words ; first, remembering our text, ' For the poor ye have always with you,' and then, turning to the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew, we find that in ministering to the poor our Saviour accepts it as to Himself ; for He says, ' Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.'

St. Paul also reminds us that we are ' to do good and to distribute, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.' There are many ways of doing good to the poor, but all are acceptable to God if the in-

tention is good, and the gift is given in the right spirit of charity and kindness of heart, for 'God loveth a cheerful giver.' A little, given from a feeling that 'the poor we have always with us,' and that in helping them—in feeding the hungry and ministering to the sick—we are doing what Christ did, and what He would have us do, is bread we are casting on the waters, which we shall find after many days. We can claim God's promise of help when we need it, if we have helped those who sought relief from us in their hour of pain and misery; for David says, 'Blessed be the man that provideth for the sick and needy: the Lord shall deliver him in the time of trouble.' And Solomon, the wisest of men, says in the same sense, if not in the same words, 'He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and look, what he layeth out it shall be paid him again.'

Those who cannot give much can often help a little, by a friendly act of kindness, a timely word of comfort. The two mites

which make a farthing, which the widow threw into the treasury, were accepted by our Saviour, for He knew the kindness of heart which prompted her to give something, though she had little enough to spare.

The hard-hearted and worldly-wise too often turn away, like the priest and the Levite, and leave the sick and suffering to those whose duty they deem it to concern themselves with such matters, forgetting the strict injunctions of the Scripture, which concern all alike, to 'do to others as we would they should do unto us,' and 'as we have opportunity, to do good unto all men.' To the end of time St. Paul's true words should find an echo in every heart,—
'And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.'

READING XXXVIII.

LUKE, xxii. 15.

AND he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.

OUR Saviour spoke many words to His disciples, which were as much intended for the instruction and comfort of future generations as for the benefit of those to whom they were directly addressed. Amongst the most solemn and urgent to all times and all ages are those relating to the first institution of the Sacraments. The Sacrament of Baptism was sanctioned by Christ Himself, who received it at the hands of John the Baptist (to whom that surname was given on that very account). He was the forerunner of Christ, and preached re-

pentance to the people in the wilderness of Judæa, saying, 'I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.' Jesus was thus baptized by John in the waters of the river Jordan, saying, 'For thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.' So scrupulously did Christ Himself, for our example, seek out every opportunity of practising every doctrine of His religion!

The second Sacrament, that of the Lord's Supper, is also of Divine origin. Shadowed forth, ever since the time of Moses, by the lamb that was slain by the children of Israel, when the tenth and most fatal plague was about to fall on the homes of the hardened Egyptians, and the Angel of Death spared those that were sprinkled with the blood, the Sacrament was the continuation of the Jewish Passover.

It was to be perpetuated amongst the Israelites, to remind them of the God who

had saved them from their oppressors. The Lord's Supper is to keep in remembrance our deliverance, by the blood of the Lamb of God, from the bondage of sin.

That supper was partaken of by our Saviour and His disciples on the night of His death. It was first instituted when they were all gathered together, and was eaten by the twelve with anxious expectation for, though they knew not what was to befall them on the morrow, their Master's words foretold of suffering and treachery. They have recorded His words at this solemn feast for our learning; the Jews celebrated the memory of our deliverance by the Passover, so we should retain our rescue from eternal bondage in perpetual memory also, by the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

And of this supper each of us should partake, for Jesus, who gave us the words of eternal life, bade us drink of His blood, 'which is shed for many for the remission of sins.' Not thoughtlessly and irreverently, as was too often do

early centuries after Christ's death, when it was turned from a solemn observance into a riotous feast, and gave occasion for warning to those who dared to partake 'unworthily,' but with attention and heart-felt prayer ; and so it will bring us a blessing, and we shall feel, in obeying the call of our dying Saviour, that we are doing what He would have us do ; and though His goodness and mercy are far too great for us to attempt to make any return for His love to us, yet we do what we can. At least, as far as in us lies, let us not feel that we have knowingly and intentionally left undone what we ought to have done. A dying request is always sacred ; how much more when it was a command from the lips of One who voluntarily gave Himself up to death for us ! And that last command was, 'This do in remembrance of Me.'

READING XXXIX.

JOHN, xiii. 36.

WHITHER I go, thou canst not follow me now ;
but thou shalt follow me afterwards.

THESE words were spoken by our Saviour Himself to His disciples, when they were assembled together at Jerusalem at a very solemn time, and one which can never be forgotten by us, for a memorial of it is handed down to our time in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Our Saviour was partaking of that supper with His disciples, when He took bread, and having blessed it, and the cup of wine also, He gave them to His wondering followers to eat and drink, saying that they were His body and His blood, charging them to take them in remembrance of Him.

Those who first partook of that sacred food could not understand the full significance of those words, for the sacrifice of Christ was not yet made ; but in awe and bewilderment they obeyed our Saviour's injunction, and ate and drank with Him. But to one of the number they had a deeper meaning ; for Judas, who had murder in his soul, could not remain in the presence of our Lord, and when he perceived that his guilt and treachery, though safely concealed, as he had thought, in the depths of his own heart, were known to his Master, the Searcher of hearts, he went immediately out. And then we are told, 'Satan entered into him;' not, however, till the permission had been given him. Had our Saviour, who is one with His Father, chosen even at this supreme moment to refrain from making that great sacrifice of Himself which was then imminent, He could have done so ; but His decision was irrevocable, and the word was passed to Judas, and to the father of all evil, 'What thou doest do quickly.' That great hour when the sun

was to be darkened was near at hand, and the prophecy and the promise were about to be fulfilled which had till then been a tradition among the people.

At such a time, the last hour of peaceful intercourse with His faithful followers, and with the beloved disciple John leaning on our Saviour's bosom, His words, His dying words, come with great and deep significance; and as the last words of any we have loved must ever remain impressed upon our minds, so must they have rested on St. John's. It is from him that we have the record of those beautiful and tender sayings of our Saviour which He has left to us, to be our comfort through all time. Judas was gone, meditating treachery and murder. Knowing his evil intentions, having even then sold his soul to those who gave him money as the price of blood, he had dared to partake of the sacred bread and wine with the other disciples; but after that his purpose was no longer concealed he could not face the faithful few: their innocence crushed him, and he went out.

So the words of comfort were spoken to the loving and the true alone. In sorrow and perplexity they stood there, for their Master had spoken to them of betrayal, and they knew that He was going from them. How much deeper and wilder would have been their grief, could they have foreseen what the next few days were to bring of suffering, and agony, and death! He knew it, but they were spared the knowledge of it then. We know it, for four of those who were with Him have left us the history of those sad and fearful hours.

St. John's testimony is perhaps the most touching of all, for he rested on Christ's bosom, and every word that fell from His lips was treasured up by him, to soothe and comfort him in the weary life he had to lead on earth, long after his Master had appeared for the last time to the eleven disciples, when He led them as far as to Bethany, and blessed them, and they all saw Him parted from them, and carried up to heaven. A glorious vision, one that would rest on their minds for ever. Yet

this impression rest on our minds, too, for the gracious words were spoken not to the eleven disciples only, but to us, and to all who seek to come unto the Father by Christ,—‘Whither I go thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me afterwards.’

READING XL.

Acts, i. 11.

YE men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

DURING the thirty years of our Saviour's life on earth He had been accompanied, more particularly during His later years, by twelve chosen men, known as the twelve Apostles. They were constant witnesses of all that He did, and recorders of His words and actions—actions of such deep, such vital interest to us, that we cannot but regret that we do not know more of what passed during a life so pure, so holy, so unsullied by human frailty. Especially we must feel this when we read the last words of the

Gospel of that disciple whom Jesus loved :
'And there are also many other things
which Jesus did, the which, if they could
be written every one, I suppose that even
the world itself could not contain the books
that should be written.'

Next to the interest excited by the life
of the Redeemer Himself, comes that which
is called forth by the history of those holy
men who were permitted to be in close and
constant intercourse with their Master ; for
much of His spirit remained with them. His
example could not fail of having a strong
effect upon them. Their hearts must have
been deeply impressed by the perfectness of
His sinless character, and anxious to emulate
it. More than this, our Saviour gave them
power above that of other men ; His great
gifts of healing the sick and raising the
dead descended to them. When He called
them to His presence to preach that the
kingdom of heaven was at hand, He also
said, 'Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers,
raise the dead, cast out devils ; freely ye
have received, freely give.'

With such powers as these He sent them forth to the world—a vast world of heathens and of disbelievers, Scribes, and Pharisees, high in their own esteem and righteous overmuch, and far from prepared to abandon their own faith and confess their belief in Jesus the son of Joseph the carpenter, whom the Roman rulers in Jerusalem and the high priests of the Jews had agreed to yield up to the death of the cross.

The book of the New Testament called the Acts of the Apostles, tells us how several of them sped on their mission. It was the work of St. Luke, and is believed to have been written by him in the city of Rome, to which place he travelled in company with St. Paul; but of this or its exact date nothing certain is known. To us, however, it is a most valuable evidence, not only because it contains the fulfilment of more than one prophecy, but also because it gives us the account of the first struggles of the Gospel to spread itself in the world—struggles which, commencing in a feeble ray of light, have now diffused a glorious

sunshine over all creation, and caused the light of truth to brighten our toilsome march from earth to heaven.

In the first chapter we learn the fate of the traitor Judas, the twelfth Apostle, who, having received the price of his treachery from the chief priests and Pharisees, purchased with the reward of iniquity a field, in which he fell and died; and the field was called 'The Field of Blood.' Nothing but a curse could fall on land so gained; nothing but the vengeance of God here and hereafter on the false friend who betrayed his Master with a kiss. The eleven, therefore, began their labours by selecting another from among those who, in the words of St. Peter, 'have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, that one must be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection.'

Out of two they chose one by lot, Matthias, who 'was numbered with the

eleven Apostles.' Wondrous as was our Saviour's life, appalling as are the circumstances of His death, the crowning triumph was His resurrection, His victory over death and the grave. A witness of such a miracle should indeed carry conviction in his words, and extort from his hearers the eager confession of the once doubting Thomas, 'My Lord and my God!' To us also Christ is preached, and for us those words were written, that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, believing, we might have life through His Name.

READING XLI.

ACTS, v. 29.

THEN Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

THE first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles are mainly taken up with the history of St. Peter. After the account of the wonderful gift of tongues, by which the twelve were enabled to speak to each nation in its own peculiar language, we read the eloquent address made to the devout Jews at Jerusalem, which resulted in the baptism of many of them ; indeed, so full of power were the words of St. Peter on that occasion, that there were added unto them that day above three thousand souls—a vast addition to the great army of Christ ; and theirs was a true and sincere

repentance, for they 'continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer.'

The chosen twelve worked many wonders and signs, one of which is specially recorded—that of the healing of the lame man who was daily laid at the Beautiful gate of the Temple, and who, asking alms of St. Peter, received from him a greater boon than he had ever thought to obtain from God or man. St. Peter, always ready to show forth his Master's glory, fastening his eyes upon him with John (for they were much together), said, 'Look on us ; and he gave heed unto them expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.'

Truly the Spirit of our Saviour remained with His loved Apostles ; as He had spoken to the impotent man who lay under the porch of the pool of Bethesda, in almost the same words that He had addressed to the sick of the palsy at Capernaum, His

follower now speaks to this sufferer, 'Rise up and walk.'

Only God has power on earth to forgive sin, and therefore no mortal could add the soul-saving words, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee : ' but doubtless—for only a few short years intervened between the miracle of the pool of Bethesda and that which the multitude witnessed with wonder and amazement at the Beautiful gate—doubtless the fame of the Saviour's work of mercy had reached the ears of the lame and helpless man, and his faith must have led him to hope that the grace which had been granted to one might be extended to himself also. Gratitude and joy filled his heart, and like the tenth leper who alone returned to give glory to God, 'he, leaping up, stood and walked, and entered with them into the Temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the Temple.'

This miracle was, however, an occasion

of deep offence to the priests and the Sadducees, who sought in every way to put obstacles in the path of the disciples of Christ : but, even then, St. Peter turned to advantage the enmity of the rulers ; he was summoned before them, and took occasion to proclaim the majesty and power of Christ, and many of the people which heard the word believed, to the number of about five thousand.

St. Peter nobly fought his Master's battle upon earth, and by his preaching many were converted. He suffered much, but was faithful to the end, and his life of energetic devotion to his Master's cause was closed in his Master's service. The poor fisherman, called by his Saviour's voice from casting his fishing-net into the waters of the Sea of Galilee, sealed a glorious career with the crown of martyrdom. He died a victim of his faith at Rome, under the cruel decree of the Emperor Nero, who condemned him to be crucified. Tradition tells us, that feeling unworthy to emulate Christ, even in the manner of his death, he

was by his own desire nailed to the cross with his head downwards.

St. Peter left much for our precept and example ; nothing more true and urgent, perhaps, than the principle he so consistently carried out through all the trials of his persecuted life : ‘ We ought to obey God rather than men.’


READING XLII.

ACTS, vii. 56.

BEHOLD, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

ST. PETER and the other eleven seem to have preached openly in the public places in Jerusalem, and probably, after making so many converts, they were allowed to serve their God in comparative peace ; for while they wrought such miracles of healing they were popular with the people, and the rulers found it to their advantage not to interfere too openly with men who were surrounded by thousands of followers, and who wielded such powers as theirs. They were, however, assembled on one occasion in that part of the Temple called Solomon's Porch, and there the multitudes brought their sick,


that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them ; and not only did they of the town itself come thus to the feet of the Apostles, but many from the cities round about Jerusalem, bringing sick-folk ; and they healed every one. But their increasing popularity roused the jealousy of the Sadducees, who now made an attempt to stem the tide, and thought by putting them into the common prison they could set a limit to the power of God. But their presumption was soon checked, for ‘ the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison-doors and brought them forth, and said, ‘ Go, stand and speak in the Temple to the people all the words of this life.’ This was not the only time that prison-doors were opened to St. Peter ; for when Herod put him in prison for the same crime of preaching the true religion, the angel of the Lord came down to earth once more, and bade Peter arise up quickly and follow him ; and he led him through the locked doors of the iron gates, away from the two soldiers between whom he was chained, and out



into the silent streets of the sleeping city. In both instances, after such signal deliverance, the word of God grew and multiplied.

Even Christ's religion suffers from the taint of Adam's sin, and there were soon strife and discord among the converts. The twelve Apostles therefore sought out seven men of good report, full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom, whom they appointed over this business ; reserving themselves for continual prayer and the ministry of the word. Here we first hear of Stephen, who is memorable not only for the great wonders which he did among the people, of the details of which we have no record, but also pre-eminently as the first Christian martyr. We know but little, too little, of his career, but we are told that certain of the synagogue disputed (a word there implying discussed, rather than disputed) with him, and were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. With the same evil intentions which led the chief priests and elders to bring false witnesses against the sinless Saviour, so now, unable to find

anything worthy of death in Stephen, they again suborn men, and persuade them to bring a charge of blasphemy against him, which could go no further than 'We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.' In reply to this, Stephen eloquently recapitulates in graphic language the mercy and power which God had shown in delivering their forefathers from the Egyptian slavery by the hand of Moses, and the ingratitude of the Israelites ; bringing his oration, by an abrupt transition, to bear on the descendants of those children of Jacob who were then before him as his judges :—' Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost : as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted ? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One ; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers : who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept



it.' Such stern words could but hasten his doom, 'and they cast him out of the city, and stoned him.' And may God grant that such gentle thoughts may soothe our dying bed as were St. Stephen's in that cruel martyrdom; — one thought for himself, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' and one last word of unrivalled charity in the prayer for his persecutors, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!' And then, in the calm words of the Bible, 'he fell asleep.'

READING XLIII.

2 CORINTHIANS, xii. 10.

THEREFORE I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

It is at the death-scene of the first martyr St. Stephen that Saul, afterwards so eminent as St. Paul, is first mentioned. He was there, taking care of the clothes of those who were active in stoning the first whose life was sacrificed to the faith of Christ; 'consenting unto his death.' This we are expressly told, doubtless to make the contrast of his after-conduct the greater,—'He made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison.' His zeal and energy it was that was mainly instrumental in scattering the Apostles abroad, for they

could no longer face the persecution that awaited them in Jerusalem and its neighbourhood. But good comes, often, out of evil ; and the enmity that drove them into distant countries served but to diffuse more widely the word of God, which they preached everywhere. And Philip (one of the seven recently appointed deacons, not one of the original twelve chosen by our Saviour) went into Samaria, and paved the way for Peter and John, who followed him. But before they joined him he made an important convert there. 'There was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one : to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.'

Convinced by the miracles that Philip wrought, the many sick and lame whom he healed, numbers of men and women were baptized ; and then 'Simon himself believed also ; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.'

After the interview which Philip had with the man of Ethiopia, who held great authority under Candace the queen, we do not know much more of him, except that he dwelt in Cæsarea, where St. Paul and St. Luke visited him in their journey to Jerusalem, and there is no tradition which gives any account of his death.

Saul continued his course of threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, till he performed a journey to the important city of Damascus, in Syria. He was suddenly arrested in his career of persecution by the hand of God, for a voice from heaven pealed through the air, while an unnatural light shone round him,—‘Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?’

Stunned by the supernatural voice, struck blind by the unearthly light, Saul’s first words are a confession of his God; that God whom his heart had so hated, and whom he had so grievously offended. Trembling and prostrate on the ground he asks, ‘Who art thou, Lord?’ The answer, ‘I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest,’ com-

pletes the work ; and the haughty emissary of the Jewish synagogue becomes the humble and submissive servant of God. In humility and obedience he seeks his Creator's commands : ' Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ? ' Then his followers, who had stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no man, led him by the hand to Damascus, where he remained three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

This was the commencement of the Christian life of him to whom we owe nearly all the Epistles of the New Testament, who suffered more than any other apostle in his zeal for his Master's service ; and after about thirty-five years of preaching the gospel in Judea, Samaria, and Italy, he was finally beheaded at Rome, in about the sixtieth year of his age.


To the end of his life he carried out the precept he leaves for us to follow also : ' He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord : for not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.'

READING XLIV.

Acts, xvii. 22, 23.

THEN Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

AFTER the Ascension of Christ, and the dispersion of the Apostles into different parts of the civilised world, in order that Christ's gospel might everywhere be preached, St. Paul was converted, and from a cruel persecutor became an earnest propagator of the Gospel. It is to this that he refers when he speaks of himself as 'one born out of due time;' later, that is, than the other disciples.



He travelled further than most ; he contemplated a journey to Spain, but his life was cut short at Rome, and he was probably not able to accomplish all he desired. It was in one of his long journeys on his Master's business that he came to Athens, one of the principal towns of Greece ; a city, the sight of which stirred Paul's spirit within him, for it was ' wholly given to idolatry.' Greece was at that time one of the most cultivated countries of the world. It was the seat of learning, and of science, and philosophy. There it was that, long before the time we are speaking of, letters were first used. The writings of the ancient Greeks are among the literature most highly thought of up to the present day. Their poets were men of world-wide renown, and they possessed orators and lawgivers whose names are still handed down to us ; and every possible refinement and luxury was well known among them.

But, as our Saviour said to Martha when she was cumbered about much serving, ' One

thing is needful ;' and that good part St. Paul sought to bring them, when their philosophers, men wise in their generation, scornfully asked, 'What will this babblers say? He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods.'

A new God was no great wonder, perhaps, to them ; for they had gods for all the different attributes—for wisdom, for beauty, for love, for war ; and the very hill on which St. Paul stood was dedicated to Mars, the God of War. But there was an altar which had arrested St. Paul's attention, inscribed 'TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.' Some report, some rumour of Jesus, had reached those distant shores ; a murmur of His name had been wafted across the intervening sea, and the Athenians, ever ready to run after some new thing, had at once erected an altar to this Deity, whose name, whose attributes, and whose worship, were alike unknown to them.

Him, therefore, whom they ignorantly worshipped, Paul declared unto them, in words so simple and so clear that they


might serve us for a confession and an explanation of our faith. He roused their interest ; and while some mocked, and others said ‘ We will hear thee again on this matter,’ and some few clave unto him and believed, he departed from among them. Let us not, like the former, lose our opportunity, for though Christ is preached now every day and everywhere, still there are some that mock, others that put off the concerns of eternity from day to day, saying, ‘ We will hear thee again on this matter ;’ but let us be mindful of St. Paul’s words to the men of Athens, and ‘ seek the Lord, if haply we might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us ; for in him we live, and move, and have our being.’

READING XLV.

1 CORINTHIANS, xiii. 12.

FOR now we see through a glass, darkly ; but then
face to face.

THERE are many things said in the Bible which we cannot fully understand. Many events happen in this world which we find it difficult to reconcile with our knowledge of God's love and justice ; many dark hours we are called upon to pass through, the purpose of which we cannot fathom. In many things, though we try to believe that all is for the best, our weak nature refuses to do so : we see through a glass, darkly, the workings of God's wisdom ; but our text says, *then* 'face to face.' *Then* refers to that distant shore of heaven towards which we are all tending, that



haven where we would be. But there is the dark sea of death to be crossed before we reach that bourn, that sea which makes us tremble and shrink, and, like St. Peter, tempts us to cry, 'Lord, save us; we perish!'

Once there, however, glorious things will be ours, and in our Father's home we shall no longer see the various things that have tried our faith, darkly, but face to face, clearly and distinctly, and we shall know why God's ways are not as our ways. And I believe that that will be one of the great joys of heaven; the enlarging of our understanding, and the freedom from that oppressive sense of doubt, wonder, and uncertainty, which must ever put its thorns in our path while we travel along the road that leads to God.

All will then be clear to us; we shall not there be led by faith (that constant strain on our belief and obedience), but by sight. Spiritual things will be as plain to us as the earth and sky are here; only infinitely more satisfying, more complete.

There will be none of that imperfection, that one thing wanting, which for ever clogs the enjoyment of our keenest, our most innocent pleasures in this life. The pleasures of earliest childhood are perhaps the purest we have ; for as age advances, more and more we are alive to the small vexations and worries which attend all our actions, and hinder and prevent our absorbing ourselves in the passing pleasures of the moment. The nearer we approach the grave the more we feel the emptiness of life here ; the early ambitions which fired us to great efforts have died out—ended, perhaps, in nothing ; or if we have succeeded in them, we find ourselves only on the same step where many others have been before. Our friends have gone before us, have forgotten us, or proved unworthy of our love ; our interests are less keen, for we have learnt by experience how much they are ever tainted with disappointment and bitterness ; all the bonds that bound us to earth loosen, and prepare us for the final hour when we give up our souls to God.

Then, when our earthly pleasures fail, and the past is nothing but a memory, and the present time is but as a short, uncertain winter's day, then we shall be thankful indeed if we can look forward with confident hope to the time when all shall be real, and certain, and enduring, and we see God and His wisdom face to face. Let us so run that we may obtain the crown at last ; and for that we must labour while it is day, while yet we have time, and strength, and reason given us. In the beautiful words of the Bible, 'Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern ;' ere these last moments come to each one of us (and we know not how near they are), let us give timely obedience to Christ's gracious words, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

READING XLVI.

COLOSSIANS, iii. 2.

SET your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

THERE are many verses in the Bible which we read constantly, know by heart, and perhaps even repeat to ourselves occasionally, but which do not, so to speak, come home to us, till by some special sorrow or trial, which calls out all our deepest feeling, we discover their hidden depths of meaning, their fulness of consolation, and also their richness of allegory. And whenever we read a chapter of that most precious book to ourselves at home, or hear it read in the course of the Sunday services at church, if we pay common attention to it, do we not each time discover some beauty

of truth in a passage we had scarcely noticed before, or passed over as merely a sentence or a link in the narrative or the doctrine forming the subject of the chapter? It is only in this way, by carefully taking a chapter to pieces, and dwelling on each verse in our thoughts, that we realise what a very different book we hold in our hands when the Bible is in them, to what we have in any other good book written by uninspired man.

There is hardly a verse in it but has a meaning, which at some time or other of our lives we can interpret as bearing on our own course in life. There is nothing in it but what is true; and whatever is truth, God's truth, holds good for all time: from the early days of the Old Testament, when Moses led his rough followers in troops of thousands through an unfruitful, dreary country, with the direct law of God for his guide, to the present day, when we travel along on our pilgrimage of life, often foot-sore and weary, but still looking forward to the goal, with no other sure and unfailing

guide but our trust in God ; and but for those two words, 'looking forward,' or simple hope, where should we be in this troublous world ? The Past is gone, not unmarked, not lost, but existing in memory only, either a joy or a burden as we have made it ; but it is gone, and past recall. The Present is one brief, fleeting moment, and, but for our constant reliance on a future, on what *will* be, what we *shall* do, what would our existence be ?

How well we know the feeling—it is almost the mainspring of life—of what we will do to-morrow, what will happen to us next week, next month, next year ! In our greatest enjoyments, is not our anticipation of them the greatest, the surest pleasure ? For joys that are most like rich ripe fruits are but too often Dead Sea apples, and turn to ashes in the eating. In youth, we are striving to educate ourselves for manhood ; in manhood, doing our utmost to make provision for old age ; in spring, preparing for summer ; and in glowing, sunny summer, laying by for the frosts and snows of winter.

‘Looking forward’ is thus our watchword. In our severest moments of trial we look beyond them, and the only thing that buoys us up in the hours of illness is the prospect of relief and cure. And in heavy trials—which may God in His mercy keep as long as He deems it right from each one of us!—when the waves of sorrow overwhelm us, and we feel no friendly hand is near that can help us, and we have no strength, or courage, or power left to struggle any more; then we look forward and upward, and pray to God to take us into His own hands, out of this world and into His heavenly kingdom, where peace and rest unknown on earth await us.

Then, when we most need it, and when no other help can touch us, we shall feel the value of having set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For there where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also. And what more true? Whatever our earthly treasure, whether riches, or love, or ambition—there, wherever whatever it is, our thoughts are constantly

tending. Well, indeed, for him whose thoughts tend heavenward; who, while working his way on earth, and fulfilling all the duties, ay, and enjoying all the pleasures God has sent him in the world, has laid up a store in heaven! Some good actions, some charitable, kindly thoughts, some gentle words when hasty ones were ready, some self-denial, some act of moral courage, some generous actions, known perhaps to no one in the world, but chronicled by God;—these are our treasures in heaven; and these, with the forgiveness bought for us by Christ, will prove our salvation at last.

READING XLVII.

JAMES, iv. 14, 15.

WHEREAS ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

WE ought, indeed, to think and to feel that, 'if the Lord will,' we shall do this or that, for it is by His will alone that we live, or move, or have our being; by Him we were created, by Him we are sustained every day of our lives; He it is who keeps the wonderful machinery of our bodies in order, who regulates the flow of our blood, the action of our hearts, and the unceasing breathing of air in and out of our lungs.

As long as this all goes on with un-

changing regularity we give but little heed to it ; it is only when the regularity ceases that we begin to wonder. Never realising that it is more wonderful that such complicated machinery should continue in its constant order, than that any part of it should fail. The least diminution of our powers, the smallest difficulty or hindrance in following our daily avocations, at once alarms us, and it is then that our attention is awakened to the fact, that, strong as we think ourselves, we are utterly and entirely powerless in the things that most nearly affect us.

It would be useless for us to say we will not go on breathing, that we will eat no more, or live without sleep. As God has created us, so we remain ; or rather, so He maintains us. Those who declare they believe in no God, can hardly uphold the argument that they live by an effort of their own will, or why should they ever die ? Neither can they maintain that they created themselves, or why should they ever yield the life they gave themselves ?

For those who do not believe in a God cannot look forward to any futurity in heaven, or have any hope, therefore, beyond the grave. Life on earth must be all they expect. But how awful must it be to shrink humanity when the last hour is near, and having denied their Maker during their lives, the conviction is forced on the unbelieving at the last, that there is a Power superior to their own ! A Power whose authority is reducing them to the dust whence they came ; the riches, the pleasures, the renown for which they have lived and laboured are fading from their grasp, and the daylight deepens, and the things of God are hid from their eyes. Then it will be too late ; and bitter as may be the cry, ' Lord, Lord, open to us,' the answer is only ' Verily I say unto you, I know you not.'

Life on earth is only like a vapour ; like the thin mist that veils the hills in the morning and melts away before the warm rays of the sun, and vanishes, and is seen no more. Its real importance lies in the

use we make of it as a means to an end : it is not in itself the real thing we have to live for, but it is a path that leads to eternity.

There are two ways we may follow, two paths—one by the wide gate and the broad way that leadeth to destruction, the other the road that leads to God ; ‘ where strait is the gate and narrow is the way, and few there be that find it.’ God grant that we may follow with patience and courage the narrower but safer road ! full of trials it may be, but it is the only way that shall bring a man peace at the last, and enable us to sing the triumph-song of Heaven,—‘ O Death, where is thy sting ? O Grave, where is thy victory ?’

READING XLVIII.

REVELATION, xx. 13.

AND the sea gave up the dead which were in it ; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them : and they were judged every man according to their works.

THERE is no escape from the all-seeing eye of God. He sees each one of us now, and at the last day it will be known to Him where each soul is that ever was created. Not only that, but what each soul has done ; whether the talents entrusted to him were hidden in a napkin, or whether they were employed to the best advantage for the glory of God and the good of mankind. If so, their names are found written in the Book of Life. And those whose names are not there will be cast into the lake of fire.

Many will say in that day to the mountains, 'Fall on us;' and to the hills, 'Cover us;' but all endeavour to escape from the all-seeing eye of God must ever be in vain.

Did not David, in one of those psalms in which he most earnestly extols God's Almighty Providence, express this very conviction, when he says, 'Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me; yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.'

And in those beautiful chapters called the Sermon on the Mount, when our Saviour addressed His Apostles, standing on one of the Syrian hills near the broad

Sea of Galilee, out in the open air of heaven, He says, speaking of God's care for His people,—‘Behold the fowls of the air : for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they ?’ And again, in His charge to the Apostles when He sent them forth to preach to all lands, He says, ‘Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father ? But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore ; ye are of more value than many sparrows.’

These and many more passages of Scripture show us that God is everywhere, that He is present with each one of us, that He watches our words, our motives, and our actions, and will judge us by them at the last day, when the sea gives up its dead. Not one of the countless numbers whom the ocean-waves have swallowed up since the world began, and still buries in its cold waters when storm and tempest sweep

over its troubled surface—not one of those who perish beneath the waves, unnoticed and unknown, with no human eye to see, will ever be forgotten by Him who created them.

One might almost think, that of the many who perish, uncared for almost, in our crowded cities, and whose place is filled up as soon as they are gone, some might be overlooked by God : but no ; such is His power and omniscience, that the very hairs even of their heads are numbered. Every created soul is of value to God—of more value than many sparrows ; and of them not one can fall without God's knowledge and permission.

No guilty, sin-stricken head can hope to hide from his Judge, for darkness and light are alike to Him ; and in the uttermost parts of the sea He is there also. There is comfort in this reflection, and warning also ; for while we know that in all our troubles God is there at hand, ready to help and hear, and knows how much we have to bear, and ' when His sorrows visit us will send

His patience too,' so there is warning also : for if we sin against His righteous laws, scorning the advantages He offers us, He knows the wickedness of our sin, and can probe the depths of our impenitence and hardness of heart. With timely fear and trembling let us remember 'that the wages of sin is death,' but with thankfulness and joyful hope that 'the gift of God is eternal life.'

READING XLIX.

REVELATION, *xxi.* 23, 24.

AND the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it : for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it.

THERE are some verses in the Bible which would be quite unintelligible but for our knowledge of the manners and customs of the tribes who now inhabit Syria, Persia, and Arabia ; the countries where the old Patriarchs dwelt, and which, like the ways of the people, remain unchanged to our time. Hills, valleys, and rivers, remain for ages, landmarks from one generation to another, and it is curious that

travellers who now visit the Holy Land and the adjacent districts find them peopled with tribes who preserve the same ways, are influenced by the same prejudices, and are ruled by the same laws of hospitality, that we find so often referred to in Bible history. They remain as unchanged as their own mountains and streams.

One traveller says, 'We may stand near one of their encampments, and as the aged men sit in dignity, and the young men and maidens drive past us their flocks, we are almost ready to ask if such an one be not Abraham, or Lot, or Jacob, or Job ; or Rebekah, or Rachel, or the daughter of Jethro the Midianite : we seem to know them all.'

Another says, 'They have kept up the custom of dressing their favourite children with coats of many colours, after the one given by Jacob to Joseph. In their matches the bridegroom sends to his bride the pair of bracelets and the earrings, as did Isaac to his beloved Rebekah. And to this day the bridegroom comes at night.

and a cry always precedes his coming.' Exactly as our Saviour narrates in His parable of the Ten Virgins, when 'at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.'

The ordinary lamps of the Eastern people are small, so that they can be easily carried in the hand, and only contain oil sufficient to last a few hours; and therefore the thoughtful would have carried with them an extra provision of oil to feed the exhausted lamp. Lamps are often mentioned in Scripture, and some of the notices refer to a custom which has in all ages been prevalent in the East, of keeping a light burning in the house all through the night. The extinction of the light was an unlooked-for occurrence, and was, therefore, often used as a symbol of violent destruction. Job says, 'How often is the candle of the wicked put out!' And in

Proverbs we read, 'Whoso curseth his father or mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness.' While the burning of the light was a token of continued protection and prosperity: 'The light of the righteous rejoiceth, but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out.'

In the great lamentation over Babylon which the angel made in the hearing of St. John, and which he records in his Book of the Revelation, one of the judgments upon the great city is, that 'the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee, and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee.'

All that is joyous, and hopeful, and cheering in our nature, connects itself with light; all that is sad and terrible, with darkness. Let us then seek for the light of heaven. Let us order our lives so that we be not 'unprofitable servants' cast into 'outer darkness,' but that we may drink of the 'river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of

God and of the Lamb ;' for ' there shall be no night there ; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun ; for the Lord God giveth them light : and they shall reign for ever and ever.'

READING L.

JOHN, v. 14.

BEHOLD, thou art made whole : sin no more, lest
a worse thing come unto thee.

THIS chapter opens with an account of a very striking miracle performed by our Saviour after He had passed thirty-one years of His life in this world. He chose a crowded town, Jerusalem, the capital city of the Jews, at a time when it was most full of people : for one of the great annual festivals, probably the Passover, was being held there. Hundreds of people flocked in at that time from all the country round. Rich merchants came from afar with their merchandise, and countless others came to buy, and many more idly thronged the

narrow streets of the ancient town,—all eager to see and hear, and ready to carry home to their villages in the distant valleys of the Jordan, and by the sea-coast around the rich towns of Tyre and Sidon, the news of all the wonders they had met with.

In one part of the town, by the sheep-market, there was a pool of water, and at certain times an angel went down to the pool and troubled the water—an angel with healing in his wings ; for ‘ whosoever then first, after the troubling of the water, stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.’

This is all that Scripture allows us to know of this very remarkable fact, but the place is still shown at Jerusalem to this day. The hand of time has swept away the five porches, though they can still be traced ; and there is no water now, and the wondrous gift of healing is no longer there. But in our Saviour’s time it was in high repute, and as He passed there were numbers of sufferers lying under the *shade* of the porch, waiting for the moment

when they should hasten and dip in the sacred water. How little they thought that a greater than the angel was there ! That One passed by and looked on them who held the power of healing in His hand, and by a single word, if He so willed, could relieve all their suffering and pain, and restore them to that health and well-being which they had lost !

But Jesus saw them all, and knew their long tale of sorrow ; and when He saw the cripple lying helplessly there He thought with compassion of the weary thirty-and-eight years in which he had endured his infirmity. Eight-and-thirty years is, indeed, as Scripture simply expresses it, ‘a long time’—all the best part of a man’s life ; and he who had suffered affliction so long must eagerly have prayed to be helped into the troubled water. How hard for him to be on the brink perpetually of water that would heal, and yet find no one, when the saving moment came, to put him into the pool ; but while he was slowly and painfully creeping down the steps, another,

too anxious for himself to heed the still greater cripple's needs, hurried down before him and gained the first step into the troubled water. Disappointed and sick at heart, the poor man had again to wait his turn.

All this was known to our Saviour as soon as His eye rested on him, and with the gentle words which were always ready on His lips He asks him, 'Wilt thou be made whole?' And then, hearing from him the short tale of sorrow and helplessness which He already knew, He adds the wonder-working words,—'Rise; take up thy bed, and walk.' The same words, with the same miraculous effect, which He spoke to the sick of the palsy at Capernaum,—'Immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed and walked.'

The crowd who thronged the pool—the busy merchants of the distant cities, the pleasure-seekers from the plains of Judea—all may, and many of them must, have seen this miracle. Well might our Saviour have afterwards upbraided them

with their hardness of heart, when the mighty works which were done before their eyes could not soften their hearts; when they scorned and rejected Him whose whole life was one long work of goodness, of mercy, and of love; and their understandings were darkened till their unbelief and impenitence brought eternal death upon them and destruction upon Jerusalem.

Let us not shut our ears to God's teaching, lest the same lamentation should ring over our lost souls that rang over the doomed city,—‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!’

READING LI.

MATTHEW, x. 32.

WHOSOEVER, therefore, shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

THESE were some of the words spoken by our Saviour after He had called together His twelve disciples, and having given them power against unclean spirits, and to heal all manner of diseases, He sent them forth to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He sent them to preach the kingdom of heaven to the Jews ; but He sent them forth with power, for He never brought forward His religion except in connexion with acts of mercy, and kindness, and love. He knew that no heart *can* be won, nor did He seek to bring

wanderers to the true faith, except by touching their feelings. His was no mere doctrine, no point of law, no result of learning, no system of forms and ceremonies ; but a religion inward and of the spirit, affecting our heart and our feelings, and from our heart guiding our outward actions.

Some religions there are which consist in the mere recital of so many prayers, some in careful and strict observance of formal ceremonies, some in making rich presents and offerings to saints and priests ; but none of these things come from the hearts of men, or spring from a deep and all-pervading love of God. They become matters of arrangement and calculation, like other transactions of ordinary business, and bring with them probably as much comfort as the successful issue of a good day's worldly work, but nothing higher.

That confession of God, or love, which should be rooted and grounded in our hearts, grows with our growth, and forms part of us ; its influence is never away

from us, and wherever we are, whatever our occupation, it guides us ; imperceptibly it may be, but still it is there. It is to our souls what daylight is to our eyes ; it is influencing all we do, though from constant habit we do not especially remark it : but if the returning day failed to dawn upon us, or God's grace were lost to our hearts, we should be helpless, despairing, and stricken with an overwhelming sense of our weakness.

The love of God was then, in our Saviour's view, the groundwork of the faith He sent His disciples abroad to teach ; and because in those dead times men needed something to arouse them from the cloudy state of darkness in which they were content to be, He armed His disciples with the power of working miracles, to awaken first of all their wonder, and then (as all our Saviour's miracles were acts of kindness) to arouse their admiration and their love. Thus touching their hearts, and winning, not driving, them to Him.

He was always careful of the weak-

nesses of human nature, feeding hungry and fainting multitudes with bread ; raising the son of the sorrowing widow, whose only comfort was about to be hidden from her in the grave ; restoring Lazarus to life at the prayer of his weeping sisters. And how must they have loved Him who came to them with such richness and fulness of comfort ! All they could do, or think, or say, could never express the worship they must have felt for One who, in the hour of bitterest need, came to them, and with gentle words healed their sorrow and bound up their broken hearts.

And why did He do so much for them ? What had they done for Him ? They had done the one simple thing He asked of them, the one thing He asks of us. They believed on Him, they confessed Him before men, they loved Him ; and He did those great, merciful, and miraculous actions while He was on earth, and left us a record of them, that we might know and feel that if we let our hearts go out toward Him, though now He is hid from our eyes.

He will be present with us, and in our trials and needs He will not fail us nor forsake us : but if we have confessed Him before men, He will confess, or acknowledge, us also before our Father which is in heaven.

Sad would be our fate if at the last day our Lord did not acknowledge us as among those for whom He died ! And if we scorn the salvation He holds out to us, can we expect that He will remember us ? Let us then, both in the day of prosperity and in the hour of trial, lift our eyes and our hearts to Him whose invitation is so readily extended to us, and whose promises are rich and certain of fulfilment. ‘Incline your ear and come unto me,’ is the gracious invitation ; and the glorious, unchangeable promise, ‘Hear, and your soul shall live.’

READING LII.

MATTHEW, xiii. 24, 25.

THE kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field : but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

THIS is the beginning of one of the parables by which our Lord often illustrated His conversation with His disciples, awakening and arousing their attention by them as pictures arrest us in a book, or as an anecdote may relieve and enliven a sermon, and recall the wandering thoughts of the hearers. But the thoughts of the twelve faithful Apostles of Christ can never *have strayed* far from their Lord, if we

may judge by the accuracy with which they put down in writing the precious words that fell from His lips. Knowing the greatness of their privilege in hearing with their ears the riches of His wisdom and knowledge, they were anxious, as far as in them lay, to transmit to the generations beyond them, even to our own time, as much as they could of what impressed them so deeply, and made their hearts burn within them when He talked with them by the way, and opened to them the Scriptures.

These parables of our Lord are almost all taken from the most familiar things, so as to strike at once to the understanding of the hearers. The subject of sowing is a theme frequently employed, for it was one that went home to the hearts of the disciples, who were plain, unpretending men, who had left all and followed Him.

And in this we see the beauty and simplicity of our Christian religion. They were not men of science and profound learning, whose lives had been spent in

educating and cultivating their minds, so as to prepare them for the reception of the great system of a new Creed. No, they were hard-working, but true-hearted men, who had laboured with their hands, and whose one qualification was simple faith. They were struck with the beauty and purity of our Lord's character, and God put into their hearts good thoughts, as He puts them at times into ours, and the good seed that was thus sown bore fruit a hundred-fold. They did not sleep, for their motto was, 'Watch and pray.' There was no time for the enemy to sow tares among the wheat, and the harvest grew and prospered, and they became for evermore, for time and for eternity, the blessed followers of our Saviour.

They left their record on earth in the books of the New Testament, the root and ground of our religion. They tell us of our Saviour's words, of His actions of charity, and kindness, and care for the suffering and the sorrowful; and while they led a devoted and faithful life on earth, blessed

with the constant presence of their Redeemer, they have left us an example that we shall do well to follow ; and as by their means the good seed has been sown in our hearts, let us also see that we do not let it perish by the tares which our enemy the Devil is always seeking to plant with the wheat to destroy it. The tares being temptations and sinful pleasures of the world, which if we sleep, or in other words become careless and indifferent to the whispers of our conscience, will so overwhelm it at last that we shall no longer distinguish between good and evil, and then shall be an easy prey to our enemy, and our fate will be sealed. We shall stand on our Saviour's left hand on the day of judgment, and receive the sentence that condemns us to eternal destruction, and changes hope to final despair.

Let us then in time beware that such a fate be not ours, but let us so strive that we may at the last day obtain the glorious fulfilment of Christ's promises, and hear

Him say the words of triumph,—‘Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom that is prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’

CHRISTMAS DAY.

LUKE, ii. 10, 11.

FEAR not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

WELL, indeed, might the Angel of God call them tidings of joy! This was the accomplishment of the event that had been looked for for four thousand years. From the long-distant days of man's first transgression, through the succeeding ages, this Star of Hope was the ray that had lighted the path of the Patriarchs, the Prophets, and the believing Jews, through all the darkness of sin and ignorance, of war, idolatry, and captivity.

This was the oath God sware unto Abraham ; the promise He made to Jacob ; the Redeemer foretold by David ; the Prince of Peace, the Rod out of the stem of Jesse, of whose coming Isaiah spoke ; and whom Jeremiah addresses as the righteous Branch of David, 'THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.' He it was to whom the prophet Micah alludes when he speaks of Him who should come forth to be Ruler in Israel out of Bethlehem-Ephratah ; the 'Shepherd' of Zechariah ; He, whose long-expected birth was announced by the appearance in the heavens of a new star,—this promised Saviour of the world was come. Well might the wise men of the East rejoice with exceeding great joy !

Never before, and never again, could an event of such magnitude occur in this our world. The state of mankind in previous years had been a state of sin ; the just among them lived by faith, their salvation was only gained by adherence to the Jewish law, with faith or belief in the promises : but how dark and difficult a

religion was this! Thank God that we have the Gospel for our guide; Christ's pure life for an example; the teachings of His disciples for our doctrine; His loving words and actions for our guidance; and His blood shed for us on the cross for our redemption!

The shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks by night in the field were startled as the glorious vision of an angel appeared before them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and their hearts were sore afraid. But the angel spoke to them, and in words of surpassing power announced to them the beginning of a new system, the birth of a new dispensation. The strict, stern, ceremonious law of the Jews, was about to yield to the softer, loving, and merciful religion of the Gospel, and the long-promised coming of a Saviour was about to be realised. The hearts of the awe-struck shepherds must have responded to the thrilling music of the multitude of the heavenly host, as their sacred voices stirred the midnight air with the

words that find an echo in all our hearts on Christmas Day,—‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.’

To these shepherds, as to the wise men of the East, it was given to see the Messiah face to face ; to worship Him, the Redeemer of the world, as the babe lying in the manger. Perhaps it may be ours to see Him when He shall come again in His glory, and all His holy angels with Him. The devout Simeon, and Anna the prophetess, took the child Jesus in their arms, and blessed Him, for they were not to see death till they had seen the Lord Jesus. May we so feel, and see, and acknowledge Him in our souls, that our dying words, too, may be the peaceful ones of the aged Simeon,—‘Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.’

NEW-YEAR'S DAY.

MATTHEW, xxv. 13.

WATCH therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

DAYS, weeks, and months roll on, the seasons follow each other, and now in the depth of winter, while all nature is sleeping, we enter upon another year. We know all that has happened to ourselves, and much that others have lived through, since the beginning of the year now passed away; but not one single thing can we look to with certainty in the year that is coming. Not a day in it that we can call our own, not one event of the many that will happen to us can we now foresee. Whether the coming year will bring us good or evil, joy

or sorrow, is known to God, but not to ourselves. Whether it will bring us life or death even is hid in the veil of mystery. We may expect much, we may form plans, we may dread misfortune; but whether our expectations will be richly realised, or whether they will fall to the ground, whether we shall carry out our plans or be foiled in our intentions, whether the misfortune will be heavier than we dreaded, or whether it will dissolve like the morning mist, it is not given to us to know.

All is in God's hands. It is our lot to work on, with darkness before us, which we cannot see through, but which recedes as we approach, and which the daylight of the Present illumines. After awhile we shall have penetrated through the earthly cloud, and the clear radiance of heaven will dawn on our astonished gaze. There, where 'there shall be no night, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun: for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever.'

Still we can do much for ourselves. For

our past sins there is repentance. When St. John preached before the coming of Christ his words were, 'Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Before he baptized his followers in Jordan, a sign to them of their new life, he called on them to repent of the past.

Repentance, and consequent forgiveness of the sins we have committed, are the first steps towards an amended future. For without ease of mind, and that peace which the world cannot give, there will be no happiness for us in earth or heaven. And while our consciences are burdened with unrepented sin, how can we seek God's loving protection for the future? Now, in the opening year, let us 'seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.' Let us remember that each year we live we are either nearer to or farther from our Father's home—that at the last day that will be the only thing that will have the slightest importance for us. Perhaps we may never see the close of another year; many now alive certainly

will not, and we may be of the number of those whom the Reaper, whose name is Death, has already marked for his harvest. Life is uncertain in everything except in its end : for the end must surely come one day to us all. To some suddenly, to others after warning. But each thought, each word, each action, from our youth up to our dying day, is chronicled in God's Book of Judgment ; and when our good actions are balanced against our evil ones, and found wanting, we shall cry in vain, ' Lord, Lord, open to us.' Let us, then, make our peace with God while it is called To-day, that ' though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' Then we may hope to be of those on the King's right hand, to whom the blessed words will be spoken,—' Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'

ASCENSION DAY.

JOHN, xiv. 2.

IN my Father's house are many mansions : if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

THE Ascension of Christ, the climax of His wondrous life in Judea, is distinctly mentioned by two of the Evangelists only, St. Mark and St. Luke. St. Matthew's last account of our Saviour after His victory over death and the grave speaks of His desiring His eleven disciples to go into Galilee, and await Him on a mountain which He appointed. When they saw Him, 'they worshipped Him : but some doubted.' He bid them teach and baptize all nations, and promised to be with them to the end of the world. St. Mark says, that 'He appeared

unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not on them which had seen him after he was risen ;' and gave them the same message, to 'preach the gospel to every creature.' Then St. Mark adds, 'So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.' St. Luke also says, 'And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, that he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.' St. Luke, therefore, gives us the exact locality of the spot where the Saviour before the eyes of the eleven who had followed Him so closely in His earthly career, was taken up, a cloud receiving Him out of their sight. This little village of Bethany, situated on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, with the valley of the Jordan lying below, was the scene of some of the most touching and most tranquil episodes of our Saviour's life. Here it was

that He rested in the house of Mary and Martha, where the latter was cumbered about much serving, and Mary sat at Jesus' feet. There it was that He spoke to her,

Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things : but one thing is needful ; and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.'

It was in Bethany, too, that our Saviour, in the house of Simon the leper, was anointed by the woman with the alabaster box of precious ointment, which she poured on His head as He sat at meat. And here the words were spoken which are an everlasting proof of the truth of the Gospel,—'Where-soever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.'

Here, too, one of Christ's most gracious acts was performed. For here Lazarus dwelt. Lazarus, over whose death his Master wept ; and even the Jews were constrained to say, 'Behold how he loved

him!’ Lazarus, who even in the grave, where he had lain many days, heard the voice of power — ‘Lazarus, come forth!’ And the dead was raised, and the glory of God revealed.

Here, then, it was that our Saviour was last seen on earth. In this quiet spot, where His calmest hours had been passed, He bade adieu to His faithful apostles, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. We can fancy how their lingering gaze dwelt on the sky that had again received Him, and how their sorrowing hearts must have been comforted by the angelic voices that fell upon their ears,—‘This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.’

We, too, know that He will come again, for He has said Himself, ‘I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also.’ Therefore, ‘Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.’

LONDON :
PRINTED BY JOHN STRANGEWAYS,
Castle St. Leicester Sq.



